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Exploring nonformal adult learning in a business school leadership programme: A case study of the Nexus programme

by

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As the candidate's Supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signed:

Vaughn Mitchell John
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to David, my partner in life and love, and to Olivia, Chloe, Joseph, Mia and Leila

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"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

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Abstract

This study examined how participants in a business school nonformal leadership programme, Nexus, learn. The nature of learning as reported by Nexus participants and programme managers was explored, as well as how participation on Nexus impacted the leadership practices and broader lives of programme participants. Nexus is a programme in which there is no curriculum nor are there marks awarded for assignments. There is no examination or portfolio of evidence as assurance of learning. Participants are awarded a certificate of attendance at the conclusion of the eight month long programme. There is minimal theorising of this particular form of adult learning, especially within a post-apartheid and fractured South African context, and within a business school environment. The impact of this type of learning has also not been theorised. Using transformative learning theory, and drawing on leadership literature, the study links how this transformative learning experience can lead to re-humanising leadership. It also examines the length, breadth and depth of transformative learning outcomes.

This case study of the Nexus programme collected data from focus groups and semi-structured interviews with past Nexus participants, semi-structured interviews with the programme managers of Nexus, extensive document analysis and observations of two Nexus events. Using an inductive data analysis approach in this qualitative research, the nature of learning showed that philosophically there is a need to acknowledge such learning takes time and requires multiple viewpoints, but that the structure and processes of learning must create a safe space to explore the contested socio-historical context of post-apartheid South Africa. In contrast with learning in formal settings, participants reported a sense of being 'forced to' learn about themselves and others. Data were also deductively coded using transformative learning theory. The impact of learning through participation in Nexus speaks to the many ways in which boundaries are broken down and blockages are removed. A 4 P Model of learning (Prescribed process, Participation, Profound transformative learning, and Praxis) is proposed.

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AoM	Academy of Management
BLF	Black First Land First
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Systems
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CLS	Critical Leadership Studies
COSATU	The Congress of South African Trade Unions
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EAP	Economically active participants
ELD	Experiential Learning Day
GIBS	Gordon Institute of Business Science
GSB	Graduate School of Business
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HN	Human nature
HR	Human Resources
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPO	Non-profit organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OVC	Orphans and vulnerable children
PYLP	Philippine Youth Leadership Program
QSWUR	QS World University Rankings
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TB	Tuberculosis
THE	Times Higher Education
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UH	Uniquely human
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNISA	University of South Africa

UP	University of Pretoria
URAP	University Ranking by Academic Performance
US	United States
USB	University of Stellenbosch Business School
WBS	Wits Business School
Wits	University of Witwatersrand

Chapter 1: Introduction

South Africa is a country in transition. The apartheid policy of the former government, which deliberately separated people into 'White' and 'non-White' groupings and denied 'non-Whites' access to socio-political and economic opportunities, still impacts the common understanding of today's South African people. Professor Nick Binedell, founding dean of the University of Pretoria's (UP) business school, contends that for countries in transition the key success factors include the establishment of robust institutions and leadership. In fact,

> institutions, and society in general, need to be inspired, led and managed by strong leaders; leaders who are able to knit together a narrative … that reflects the time we are in, and the work they need to do to … lead an organisation that is lively, energetic, innovative and imaginative. (Binedell, 2014, p. 2)

UP's business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), offers postgraduate qualifications in business and management studies as well as a slew of non-traditional leadership programmes. Nexus, which was conceptualised by and established as a programme in 2002 under the direction of Professor Nick Binedell and provides the setting for this research, is an example of the latter.

Nexus is an eight month long leadership programme, with an uncharacteristic leadership pedagogy, offered to middle managers at UP's Johannesburg-based business school. It has an espoused intention to develop leaders who can embrace change within a South African context. Whilst not a formal curriculum-driven leadership programme, its focus is about self, this country and leadership.

This research explored the nature of learning of Nexus participants; how, if at all, emotions and relationships played a role in learning on Nexus; and finally how, if at all, this learning impacted on the personal, organisational and social lives and leadership practices of the participants.

Several years ago, as a Senior Programme Manager with oversight of the management of the Nexus programme, I was exposed to an incident during a Nexus session that both fascinated me and left me wondering about what, in the pedagogy of this particular programme, allowed participants to open up to each other and to begin to build trust across deeply fractured lines. The Nexus participants had just returned from their first experiential learning journey, or field trip, to the Apartheid Museum. I was asked to observe the self-facilitated group session that followed in order to report back to the Division Manager about the facilitation process. Two

of the male participants in the group, in particular, were reflecting that what they had seen at the Apartheid Museum had surfaced certain feelings and memories. One of the museum exhibits shows a video of the then South African Defence Force (SADF) violently quelling an uprising in a township. At the time of the video recording, the armed struggle, led by the African National Congress's Umkhonto we Sizwe, (MK), had escalated and MK, together with the newly formed and largest trade union, The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), were amongst several movements leading mass political opposition in the country. The militarised state of the late 1980s responded with unprecedented force against the increasing protests in the country. Between late 1985 and June 1986, the State first declared a partial and then a nationwide state of emergency (Black, 1999).

One of the Nexus participants, a White man, told the story of his conscription into the country's defence force after leaving school in the late 1980s. His story was one of wonderment at how young, unwitting and naïve he had been and, now that he was older, of the struggle to reconcile himself with that younger person. Another man, a Black participant, recounted how, during the state of emergency, he and his family had been keeping an all-night vigil in their home in the township in honour of a family member who had died. It was illegal for people to gather after dark as a curfew was imposed on all township residents. The second storyteller then told of how their home had been shot at by members of the SADF and how he, as a young boy, had been told by his mother to crawl towards the wall in the direction from where the shooting was coming so that the bullets would pass overhead. What I found both amazing and incredible is how each storyteller listened to the other person, and how respectful and humble each was in giving their feedback. While I cannot recall that these two stories were in any way connected except by geography, the power of these accounts lay in the fact that they were both very intense in each person's memory and vividly told, and presented two different sides of the 'same' story. The lingering questions I have include: What did both stories mean to these men as they left the session? What did it mean to the members of the group who were a part of the telling of these stories? What impact did each story have on how the participants now understood the world? What did this mean for each member of the group at a personal and societal level; and did this affect how they interacted with their work colleagues thereafter? What contribution did the pedagogies of the experiential learning journey, dialogue, reflections and storytelling make to their learning as adults in a leadership programme? Such questions from my earlier involvement in the Nexus programme have generated interest in pursuing this study. The educators involved in managing this programme are not sure what the answers to these questions are, and this research will help to better articulate such understanding.

1.1 Historical and country context

1.1.1 Apartheid is over, but is it?

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Marx, 1852, 1937)

European settlers first settled in the Cape in 1652, and over the past three and a half centuries the people living in this country have been unjustifiably segregated on the basis of race. After a long period of colonisation, in 1948 the National Party came into power, and laws were promulgated to develop the various race-based groupings separately and supposedly equally. This legally-based separation of people living in South Africa, apartheid, had laws which favoured those of European descent, the Whites. All other people were deemed non-White and this majority group bore the brunt of punitive laws economically, politically and socially. Gibson (2015, p. 43) writes that "apartheid … [was] a well-articulated ideology, grounded in politics and sanctioned by religion, … [that] asserted the superiority of one group and the inferiority of others." See Toefy (2014) for a succinct history of apartheid in South Africa, and the impact of apartheid legislation. In 1994, a new democratic government under Nelson Mandela was voted into power, and the long and hard work of redress and building democracy began.

At the time of writing, 24 years since the official end of apartheid, South Africa remains beset with racial tensions, and seemingly bewildered as to how to undo the 'tradition of all the dead generations' that Marx alludes to. Today, as Toefy (2014, p. 15) writes, "the relics of oppression and segregation are strongly present in everyday South African life", and racism remains "disconcertingly recalcitrant in contemporary South Africa" (Duncan, Stevens, & Canham, 2014, p. 284). Despite being into the third decade of democracy "considerable racial prejudice persists in the country" (Gibson, 2015, p. 42). Just in 2017 alone, racism has made news in schools (racist teacher at one Johannesburg high school; pass-note system at another high school for pupils wearing non-uniform dress such as Islamic head covering), advertising (Dove advertisement), PR agency Bell Pottinger (White Monopoly Capital campaign), Black First Land First (BLF) (anti-White Monopoly Capital movement), Spur steakhouse (a confrontation between two customers, one Black and the other White in the restaurant), 'service delivery' and community protests (Vuyani school closures, Marikana, amongst many others), trade union COSATU (apology for racist slurs against City of Johannesburg Member

of the Mayoral Committee Michael Sun), and the coffin assault case (two White farmers found guilty of forcing a Black man into a coffin and closing the lid). The list is never-ending.

1.1.2 A note on race

Jansen (2017, p. 10), writing to school leaders and teachers, pleads that "instead of teaching our children about differences – we did that for three centuries – teach them about sameness, about common origins and about how our lives are richly entangled from centuries of living and loving and now learning together." He holds that one of the lies of apartheid is that there are only four races (African, Coloured, Indian and White) and more, that the Africans can be further subdivided into about 12 tribes, each distinct from each other in culture and beliefs. Despite the admonition from Jansen that we need to move beyond the four race categories, and to stop believing that there are differences between these groupings, for the purposes of this research it is important to briefly explain the common understandings of each race group. The terms African or Black or Black African, Coloured, Indian/Asian and White hold certain connotations, and are often at the heart of debates of what it means to be South African in this new democracy.

Black Africans comprise 79.2% of the South African population, Coloured 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5%, White 8.9% and others 0.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2012). As the apartheid government soon found out, classification into these four racial categories has no scientific basis, and in the 1951 national population census it was the judgement of the census enumerators who had the final say in assigning people into one of these categories. The judgements were based on 'common sense' using appearance and general acceptance into a particular community. The Population Register Act contains vague definitions of race as follows:

> "native" [Black Africans] means a person who is in fact or is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa; "white person" means a person who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person; and "coloured person" means a person who is not a white person or a native. (Union of South Africa, 1950b, p. 277)

Segregation of the South African population on the basis of race, religion and culture meant that Whites gained rights and privileges with attendant status, while all others were oppressed and subjugated. Although the country now enjoys political democracy, it is questionable whether social and economic conditions have changed for many after apartheid. The Group

Areas Act (Union of South Africa, 1950a) created segregated residential areas within the urban regions for different races, and restricted occupation and ownership of land. These segregated spaces continue to exist in contemporary South Africa, and are referred to as the legacy of apartheid spatial planning. Miller's (2016) aerial images provide stark evidence of this.

> During apartheid, segregation of urban spaces was instituted as policy. Roads, rivers, 'buffer zones' of empty land, and other barriers were constructed and modified to keep people separate. 22 years after the end of apartheid, many of these barriers, and the inequalities they have engendered, still exist. Oftentimes, communities of extreme wealth and privilege will exist just metres from squalid conditions and shack dwellings. (J. Miller, 2016)

Whilst the terms Black African, White (or European) and Indian/Asian carry some sense of the origins of the population group, the term 'Coloured' in South Africa was and remains a problematic label (Toefy, 2014, p. 24). At the time that the Dutch settlers occupied the land around what became known as Cape Town, the indigenous populations were the Khoi and San peoples. Cape Town also had a thriving slave trade for some nearly 200 years. These slaves came from India, South-East Asia, Indonesia, Bengal and Ceylon and parts of Africa. In 1834 the term Coloured was used in legal papers to refer to the Khoisan and slave people, and the children and grandchildren who were born as the result of miscegenation. The Coloured population thus traces its origins back to many ethnic origins.

Because race has played such a central role in privileging or subjugating different groups of people, and still today we are grappling with the lingering effects of apartheid, it was important here to signal how the identities of South Africans are still closely associated with race, and that it matters.

1.1.3 A note on inequality levels in South Africa

Contemporary South African society is marked by high levels of inequality, in fact this country has one of the most unequal societies in the world. According to The World Bank (2017), South Africa retains a dual economy, in which the wealthiest 20% consume 65% of total expenditure, and the poorest 20% less than 3%. Landman (2013, p. 143) cites historical and geographical factors, race and gender as drivers of economic inequality, as well as unequal access to education and technology. He raises the issue of employment as a further factor: 50% of South Africa's income is earned by 10% of its population. The 2017 second quarter Labour Force Survey gives the following employment rates: Black African 40.4%, Coloured

47.9%, Indian/Asian 52.9% and White 63.5%. More tellingly, using the expanded definition of unemployment, the rates are: Black African 40.9%, Coloured 30%, Indian/Asian 19.8% and Whites 7.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2017b).

The Gini coefficient in 2014 based on expenditure data was 0.65, and based on income data was 0.69 (The World Bank, 2017). South Africa is the most recent member of BRICS, an association of major emerging national economies, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Data from these selected low- and middle-income countries (The World Bank, n.d.) show that South Africa has, over nearly two decades, maintained its high Gini coefficient. In 1993 Brazil had a Gini coefficient of 0.60 similar to that of South Africa, but in 2014 was estimated at 0.52. In comparison South Africa was at 0.59 in 1993 and in 2014 the Gini coefficient was 0.63. Showing a similar downward trend to that of Brazil, Russia's Gini coefficient was 0.48 in 1993 and 0.40 in 2014. The remaining two BRICS countries, India and China have missing data, but both are reported as having Gini coefficients less than 0.4: in 1993 India had an estimated Gini coefficient of 0.32 with no record indicated for 2014, and with no record for China in 1993, the Gini coefficient in 2014 was 0.39. Thus it can be seen that on many levels, and in comparison with other emerging economies, South Africa was and remains one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Lack of access to quality education and healthcare remain key drivers in maintaining inequality and exclusion. The South African government is in the initial phase of implementing a Universal Health Coverage project, the National Health Insurance (South African Government News Agency, 2017) and is committed "to finding sustainable solutions to the funding of the social wage in general, and education, in particular."

However, Landman (2013) argues that social capital, those relationships and networks that exist amongst people which allows for a sharing of values and commonly held rules of behaviour, must exist in South Africa in some way. Given that in this country there are "all the fault lines that one can have in a modern society … rich vs poor; white vs black; educated vs illiterate; rural vs urban; traditional and patriarchal vs gender equality; Christian vs Muslim vs Jew; immigrant vs locals" (Landman, 2013, p. 159), he contends that the country has more social capital than is credited for. This is the particular context in which leaders have to operate in South Africa. Part of a South African leader's mandate is to build trust across systemic fracture lines.

1.1.4 Leadership, management and diversity in South Africa

There are great demographic distortions within South African organisations, despite the government's efforts to effect transformed workplaces. Employment equity legislation has

been promulgated (Republic of South Africa, 1998, 2014) to deal with the apartheid and discriminatory laws which had resulted in disparities in employment, available occupations and income. These acts are intended to both eliminate and prohibit unfair discrimination. In practice, however, the White minority continues to monopolise “all economic and workplace activity other than menial labor” (Grant, 2007, p. 94) and “to entrench and protect their institutional power in corporate South Africa” (Vassilopoulou, Da Rocha, Seierstad, April, & Ozbilgin, 2013, p. 19).

Of South Africa’s economically active participants (EAP), 5.2 million are employed in the private sector, and 1.3 million are employed by government (at all levels) and state-owned enterprises. Of the total number EAP, 7.1 million, close to three-quarters are thus employed in the private sector. By way of illustration, data comparing the employment of Black African and Whites in management positions in the private sector is given. Of EAP, 78% are Black Africans, with only 10.7% employed in top management, 15% in senior management and 26% as professionally qualified workers. In contrast, 9.5% of EAP are White, but they occupy 72% of top management positions, 63% in senior management and 50% are professionally skilled workers. Women comprise 45% of EAP, but only 21% are in top management positions, 32% are in senior management and 39% are professionally qualified workers (Republic of South Africa, 2016/2017).

Even for those in top management, in South Africa the emerging Black executive class leaders are permitted what Vassilopoulou et al. (2013) term ‘empowered powerlessness’. This manifests in many ways such as undermining the decisions made by emerging Black leaders, collusion and exclusion, Black leaders experiencing a not-good-enough syndrome, a sense among these leaders that there is not much they can do about the status quo, a lack of requisite skills and experience, and co-opted silence through being appointed into a position but having no expectation that they have any say (Vassilopoulou et al., 2013). In South Africa, these deeply entrenched social norms add a layer of complexity in managing diversity in the workplace (Bosch et al., 2015). Despite legislation being in place to deal with discrimination, in reality the workplace can be a contested space marked by resistance, non-compliance, exclusion, prejudice and racism. This is a reflection of South African society more broadly speaking. “The need to undo the deep racial and gender inequalities that were entrenched in societies and in organizations during apartheid” (Bosch et al., 2015, p. 421) is in part what Nexus intends to deal with.

1.2 Nexus as a nonformal adult education programme in the context of the University of Pretoria's business school

This business school offers programmes that are accredited academic qualifications through the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and aligned with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) provided by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). These academic programmes that focus on management and business range from higher certificates to masters degrees to doctorates. Other accredited programmes include customised programmes offered in-house to corporate clients and are designed to meet specific organisational needs.

GIBS is the only business school in Africa to be ranked in the top 50 Executive Education providers in 2019 by the London-based Financial Times in its global ranking of business schools (Financial Times, 2019). GIBS thus enjoys an international reputation for business education in the formal adult learning sector. As explained in the previous paragraph, GIBS also offers many other classroom-based executive leadership programmes. Nexus represents an outlier in leadership programmes because of its unusual pedagogy and lack of focus on content or leadership theories. In contrast with the accredited leadership programmes at GIBS, Nexus has the hallmarks of what can be described as nonformal adult learning.

The understanding of what comprises nonformal education has developed over time, and definitions have become increasingly complex (Cameron & Harrison, 2012). Bray, in his foreword to Rogers' (2004) book *Non-formal education: Flexible schooling or participatory education?,* raises the question of why nonformal education rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in less developed countries, and then disappeared from the main discourse on adult education. He notes further "that the language of non-formal education is now back on the agenda, not only in less developed countries but also in industrialised nations … there is a new feel about the term – a very different tone from that of the 1970s and 1980s" (2004, p. xi). Colley et al. (2003, pp. 9-17) provide a useful summary on how an historical perspective of nonformal education gives insight into the political dimensions of this category of learning. The notion that adult learning could be categorised as formal, nonformal and informal came to prominence in the mid to late 20th century (Colley et al., 2003; Krupar, Horvatek, & Byun, 2017). Furthermore, nonformal education is now understood to be an integral part of lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2017).

An early definition of nonformal education provided by Ahmed (1972, p. 1) notes that "nonformal education is defined as any organized educational activity carried on <u>outside</u> the graded, age-specific, and diploma-oriented formal system. Nonformal programmes may be

designed as a supplement, follow-up or substitute to formal programs." Schugurensky (2000) describes the definition of nonformal education as a residual category (what is left over after formal education has been defined) and informal learning as a further residual category (what is left over after nonformal education has been defined). Likewise Brennan (1997, p. 186) notes that nonformal education "is an expression in the negative". As Colley et al. (2003, p. 9) note "'nonformal' as a category can only emerge in opposition to 'formal' once mass formal education becomes meaningful". The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that "learning that occurs outside of the formal learning system is not well understood, made visible or, probably as a consequence, appropriately valued" (OECD, 2019).

For noting here is that in the instances of formal and nonformal educational settings a learner has the expressed intention to learn, but informal learning often happens without this intentionality. So while it is possible to speak about formal and nonformal education AND learning, it is only possible to experience informal learning. Schugurensky (2000, p. 3) conceptualises informal learning in three forms: self-directed, incidental and social learning. He proposes two dimensions, firstly that of intentionality to learn and secondly consciousness at the time of the learning experience, to describe three forms of informal learning. It is not clear why self-directed learning is not a type of nonformal learning until the examples provided by Schugurensky are examined, and then it appears that what has been identified as self-directed learning could be better described as self-help (a child learning to tie their shoe-laces, a group of friends who want to prepare a special meal who find the information from an older relative or the internet etc.). In Table 1 I propose that self-directed learning is nonformal learning, and that self-directed informal learning is better described as self-help learning.

	Forms	**Intentionality**	**Awareness of learning experience**
Formal education and learning	Structured learning leading to certification	Yes	Yes
Nonformal education and learning	Self-directed learning	Yes	Yes
Informal learning	Self-help	Yes	Yes
	Incidental	No	Yes
	Social	No	No

Table 1: Intentionality and awareness of learning experience in formal, nonformal and informal learning (after Schugurensky (2000))

An extensive meta-analysis on formal, nonformal and informal learning was carried out by Colley et al. (2003) in which they note the difficulty with the boundary criteria between each of these categories, and propose that “in practice, elements of both formality and informality can be discerned in most, if not all, actual learning situations” (Colley et al., 2003, p. 29). Whilst I concur with (Colley et al., 2003, p. 29) that “learning is complex, and that differences between learning settings cannot be boiled down into two or even three major types” it is the very difference between studying for a qualification in a formal education setting versus participating in a nonformal learning programme that provided the interest for this research.

	Formal	**Nonformal**
Status	High	Overlooked
Knowledge	Propositional Accumulated Recorded Generalisable	Everyday knowledge Experiential Social practices and wisdom Context specific
System	Highly institutionalised Chronologically graded Hierarchical education systems	Decentralised Unstructured but organised
Process of learning including who provides pedagogic support, assessment	Didactic, teacher controlled, instructional Teacher Summative	Democratic, negotiated, student-led Teacher/facilitator None or formative
Setting and location including curriculum Specified learning objectives, certificates, time on task	School or college	Unsupervised by formal system Community centres
Purpose	Learning is prime and intended activity	Learning may be an unintended outcome of the activity
Content	Based on acquisition of established expert knowledge, understanding and practices	Context, phenomenon or skill jointly explored

Table 2: The attributes of formal and nonformal learning (adapted from Brennan (1997), Colley et al. (2003))

Mocker and Spear (1982) classify the gamut of lifelong learning opportunities as formal, nonformal, informal and self-directed learning on the basis of who controls the objectives of learning (learner or institution) and controls the means of learning (learner or institution). Using a two-by-two matrix they define formal learning as that where control of both objectives and means of learning are vested in the institution. Where control of both objectives and

means of learning are governed by the learner this is defined as self-directed learning. Nonformal learning is defined as that where learners control the objectives but not the means, and informal as when learners control means but not objectives. Figure 1 provides a model for a summary of how lifelong learning is categorised.

		OBJECTIVES OF LEARNING	
		INSTITUTION CONTROL	LEARNER CONTROL
MEANS OF LEARNING	INSTITUTION CONTROL	FORMAL LEARNING	NONFORMAL LEARNING
	LEARNER CONTROL	INFORMAL LEARNING	SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Figure 1. Categorisation of lifelong learning (Mocker & Spear, 1982, p. 4)

Using this classification, all accredited programmes are deemed to be formal learning, given that the institution has control over both what and how learning happens. In contrast, the Nexus leadership programme is classified as a nonformal learning programme. The learner would like to learn about leadership (the objective) but how this learning happens on Nexus (the means) is under the control of the institution. In fact, this control by the learner over what is learnt is an overt intention of the programme as stated in the Nexus guidebook: “You will be invited into a series of carefully designed engagements with self, with others and with the broader environment and supported to reflect on these experiences to gain new insight … your learning is unique to you” (2017, p. 4). The use of the term ‘guidebook’ is a further substantiation of the nonformal nature of learning on Nexus: it is implied that the learners take responsibility for their learning whilst they are guided through the process.

Given that there is difficulty in finding consensus on the boundary conditions for defining nonformal learning in particular (Colley et al., 2003; Werquin, 2008), on the basis that the Nexus programme is not accredited, that there is no formal examination or assessment and that there is no approved content taught, I have classified this type of learning as a nonformal adult learning programme.

1.3 Nexus leadership programme

To provide background to Nexus I begin with a quote by an individual who participated in the programme in 2013, and then explain more about the Nexus programme, its pedagogy and philosophical underpinnings. I also provide the rationale for my study within this description.

This research used transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2006b; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Dirkx, 2001, 2012a, 2012b; Gunnlaugson, 2005; Hoggan, 2016a; Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1991b, 1994, 1995b, 2000b, 2009; Newman, 1994, 2012a; Taylor, 1998, 2008; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) as the theoretical framework, and I begin by signalling key concepts of the theory highlighted by the quote. In addition, the data were interpreted using terms from authentic leadership (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), humanising leadership (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015) theories and Preskill and Brookfield's (2008) learning-leadership model.

> At the beginning I was a bit sceptical but the more we learn about each other, the more I enjoy this. I grew up not knowing what Apartheid was, but now I'm thrown into Nexus, and all of a sudden things are starting to make sense to me! I need to discover more, find out more, learn more. (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 26)

This quote by a Nexus participant highlights several aspects of the programme that this study explores. This participant highlights that today's younger managers and leaders live in a post-apartheid South Africa but do not necessarily understand the implications and ramifications of this system on our society today, which calls for a need to learn more about each other. The use of the phrase "thrown into Nexus" implies a sense of sudden change and of having perceptions challenged, what Mezirow terms "a disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 2000a, p. 22). As young executives in business need to learn to deal with leading in the complexity of the society in which we live, participation in Nexus could allow for learning more about self and the Other. Owning a better sense of the South African context, developing a better understanding of how the past continues to impact today's reality, and developing the ability to build relationships across traditionally held separations could form part of the forging of strong leaders that Binedell (2014) calls for.

As stated earlier, Professor Nick Binedell is the founding director of the University of Pretoria's business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). The Nexus programme is modelled on a previously informally-constituted gathering of business leaders from diverse sectors who began meeting in the 1980s at the invitation of Professor Binedell. These meetings happened well before GIBS was founded in 2000, and further detail about this gathering is provided in Chapter 5. What is important to note here about this gathering is the diversity of participants, and processes of story-telling and dialogue so that the group members were able to develop nuances of meaning in unfolding national events as the country moved towards a new democracy. Nexus is likewise built on the principles of multiple

viewpoints through diversity of its members, as well as narrative processes of learning. The Nexus programme was first offered in 2002 and by 2016 just over 850 people had participated in the programme.

The word 'nexus' derives from the Latin word *necto* which means "to bind or tie". Using the online search term 'Nexus meaning' yields various definitions which reference connection and being at the centre of something. The word 'nexus' is also understood as a closely connected group of people or things which often forms the central point of something. In the case of this leadership programme there is an overtly stated intention of connection for a specific purpose: "Be connected to a passionate group of people who are committed to effecting positive change in South Africa" (Nexus Leadership Programme, 2019). Thus the choice of name of 'Nexus' for this programme is highly symbolic.

The aim of Nexus is to nurture "leaders who are self-aware, [with] a high level of personal mastery [who] are able to engage meaningfully with a diversity of perspectives, and have the skills and the passion to develop innovative solutions to new challenges" (Nexus Leadership Programme, 2019). The cost of the programme in 2019 was ZAR 39,500 and, as noted on the website, "some Nexus participants are sponsored by their organisations to attend the programme while others attend in their individual capacity" (Nexus Leadership Programme, 2019).

Nexus participants, typically aged from 25-35 years old, come from the business, government and civil society sectors, and usually have few years of management work experience. During the eight-month long programme, Nexus participants meet for experiential learning days, on campus for sessions or engagements in various formats with guest speakers, and for working groups (self-facilitated dialogue sessions). In addition, self-reflection is encouraged through the keeping of a journal, through a once-only individual meeting with the programme facilitator, and in assignments in which their reflections on thoughts and actions are recorded and critically engaged with. In addition, there is planning for and involvement in a community-based project.

The outcomes of learning on Nexus are open-ended and difficult to measure. The guide book describes the pedagogy as experiential, dialogic and reflective (Nexus, 2017, p. 3). (See Appendix 5 for Nexus programme objectives.) For many adults wanting to learn more about their own leadership, these pedagogies could appear strange and an unusual means for learning about a business skill, particularly when there is a notable absence of more typical pedagogies encountered in prior formal learning. Learning on Nexus shows an absence of learning about content. Notably Nexus does not make use of leadership theories to understand leadership, nor is there a reliance on lectures or readings. The results of learning

in Nexus focus on understanding oneself and ongoing divisions and separations in contemporary South Africa, and a deeper understanding of the systemic exclusion of some of the country's people to fair access to socioeconomic opportunities.

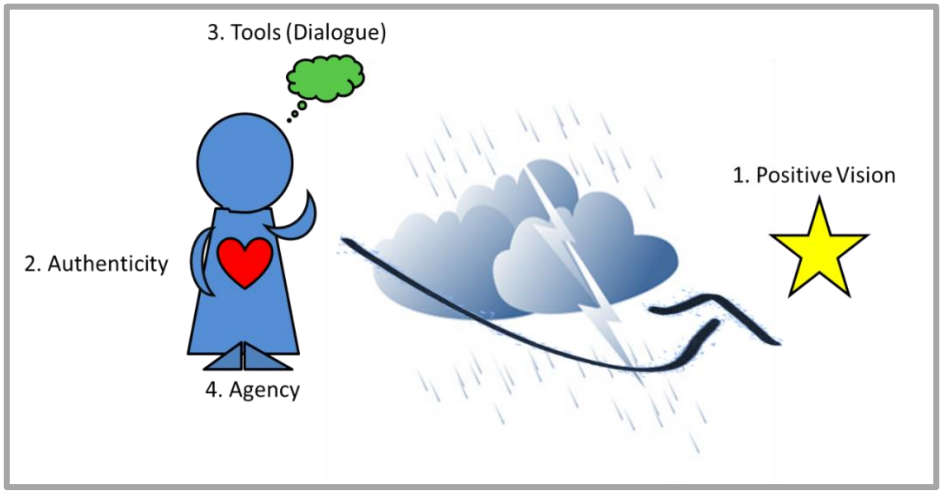


Figure 2. Nexus programme philosophy (Nexus, 2017, p. 6)

The Nexus learning experience is richly constructed, marked by moments of high emotion and personal risk taking. This is indicated somewhat in Figure 1. This figure indicates at point number 1: 'Positive vision' that the outcome of programme participation is to reframe how leaders view their role in South Africa. This is achieved through learning how to use appropriate tools of dialogue, through critical self-reflection in developing a sense of authenticity and, finally, acknowledging one's agency to create transformational change. The storm shown in figure 2 indicates that this learning experience may be stormy, frightening and tumultuous.

Teaching about leadership that is both personalised, contextualised and inclusive requires pedagogic practices that foreground the developing leader's own story, draws on her or his situated-ness, and provides the means for engagement in the messiness of leadership in context. As will be shown in Chapter 5, the pedagogic practices of the Nexus programme include narrative pedagogies of storytelling and the practice of dialogue, exploratory pedagogies of experiential learning journeys and working groups, and reflective pedagogies in assignment exercises, weekly email prompts, a one-on-one meeting with the lead programme facilitator to reflect on learning, as well as an invitation to keep a journal. In this next part I explain how dialogue is understood and practiced in the context of Nexus, what happens during working groups and experiential learning days, and provide a brief overview

of the assignments.

Throughout the Nexus programme there is a focus on dialogue (see point number 3 in Figure 2). In Nexus dialogue is understood as comprising four practices of 'listening', 'respecting', 'suspending' and 'voicing'. Each of these practices of dialogue requires an inner stilling of assumptions, opinions and thoughts. Listening is understood as the capacity to listen both outwardly and inwardly, to embrace and accept what is being said, and to let go of the 'inner clamouring'. There is an invitation to listen to the words and the silence between the words, and to listen beyond the net of our thoughts. "To listen is to develop an inner silence … The ways we have learned to listen, to impose or apply meaning to the world, are very much a function of our mental models, of what we hold in our minds as truths" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 84). Respecting derives from a stance of deep respect for and inclusion of the origination of the views of the other. It is a quest "for the springs that feed the pool of their [the other person's or persons'] experience" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 110). Respecting is being open to the fact that each of us may be taught something by another, and sees the potential for this learning that others carry inside them. Recognising the boundaries of others is not a distancing process, but rather an honouring of those boundaries.

Suspending stands in contrast to defending one's views: a process of suspending the certainty than underpins one's opinions and assumptions, whilst holding in tension that these assumptions are not suppressed nor do they need to be advocated. It is a loosening of a grip on assumptions in order to gain perspective. Suspending is "to observe one's thoughts and feelings … to bring [to] them a perspective and attention that can transform them" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 141). In voicing there must be a willingness to be still, and to trust the emptiness in dialogue. Voicing begins with listening first to one's internal emotional reactions and impulses, and asking of oneself: "What needs to be expressed here, and by whom, and for what purpose? What is trying to emerge?" Voicing is thus an action of creation.

The curriculum of the Nexus programme is driven by the participants' personal stories, and each person's "ideas shape the experience" (Nexus, 2017, p. 5). There is a strong focus on meaning being socially constructed through collective reflection and a shared sense of being both responsible for one's own and others' learning. The sharing of personal stories happens predominantly in the working groups.

Nexus participants meet as a small consistent group of between eight and twelve people in order to engage in dialogue. These are called working groups and the structure of each self-facilitated working group follows the same processes of checking in, one person telling their story, a provocative question set by the lead facilitator that is unpacked through dialogic learning, and a check out.

Working groups have two main purposes. The first is to practice dialogue, and to develop an awareness of how well each person listens, respects, suspends and voices, but also to take risks such as exposing their vulnerabilities. The second purpose of dialogue in the working groups is to deepen understanding of complex contextual social issues. During dialogue participants experience either clarification of meaning-making or alteration of their understanding. Prior to the start of a working group, it is agreed who will be the facilitator, who will be the storyteller, and a general over-arching question is provided by the Nexus programme managers.

The working group begins with a check-in in which every person briefly reflects on what is important to them at that moment. One of the working group members then tells their life story. Working groups usually meet a week after an experiential learning day has taken place and this serves as the context for the discussion in the next part of the session. The pre-determined question, couched in general terms intended to provoke reflection, is presented and the working group responds to the question. Finally, the working group closes with a check-out. During the check-out participants reflect on how they feel or think differently because of what they have experienced during the experiential learning day or working group, or how they might act differently in the future. Each working group is led in round-robin fashion by one of the group members. The role of the group leader is to ensure that the agreed structure is maintained, and responsibility for keeping the dialogue processes in check is that of each group member.

Part of the ground rules of working groups is that each person is invited, even expected, to make a contribution to the dialogue, this in response to the principle of voicing which answers the question "What could I say now that will build understanding?" This may require that when giving voice, vulnerability becomes the driver that allows a view to be expressed. Each participant is also expected to suspend judgement as another person speaks: to maintain a curiosity about another person's point of view. They are also invited to see what each group member can teach them. This informs the practice of respecting the other. And finally, they are expected to listen with emptiness in order to fully and truly hear what another speaker is saying.

Experiential learning days (ELDs) are referred to in the Nexus guidebook (2017, p. 4) as "learning journeys [which] are day-long field trips to visit communities, government initiatives, businesses and historical sites that provide direct engagement with the specific themes and issues being explored in the programme." The first ELD of the year begins with visits to historical sites so that Nexus participants can begin to reflect on their understanding of the past in this country. Given the country's recent move into democracy and the long history of

exclusion and separation under apartheid, this ELD provides the opportunity for participants who hold diverse experiences and views of the country's history to explore what this means for others in the group. The second ELD has a focus on the present circumstances in South Africa, and visits to various communities take place. The final ELD has a future orientation which provides the programme participants with opportunities to visit leaders in their communities who work to uplift those around them. Planned ELDs are sometimes disrupted because of social unrest in the community to be visited. In these cases visits to alternate communities may take place, or sometimes the ELD is postponed.

Two further out-of-the classroom events include a one night residential retreat off campus that focuses on how participants can develop their authenticity as leaders, and a community engagement project. The activities planned during the retreat are designed to help participants reflect on their practices, beliefs and assumptions. Over time and year to year these activities vary. Fuller explanation of activities will be explained where respondents make reference to these. The community engagement project is done in groups where the Nexus participants have self-selected the project's activity. This means that the groups are different from the working groups. The purpose of the community engagement project is to identify a community not typically encountered or interacted with, and to develop an activity that allows Nexus participants and the community members to learn from and through each other.

The Nexus guidebook explains that "assignments are designed to deepen your engagement with the content of the Nexus programme. In many of them, you are asked to practically apply your learning in some way and then to reflect on that experience and what you have learned from it" (Nexus, 2017). These reflective assignments are formatively assessed to ensure that processes of dialogue have not been misunderstood or improperly applied. Further detail about the assignments are provided in later chapters, particularly in sections 5.2.4 and 5.3.7. Table 11 also provides a summary of the assignments given in 2017 to Nexus participants. There are five individual assignments and one group assignment. In 2017 the individual assignments were titled "Engaging in dialogue across difference", "Dialogue in the workplace". "Proposal: Deepening your learning", "Assignment: Deepening your learning" and a "Pecha Kucha presentation". The group assignment was a "Community Learning Project: Taking the Trouble to See Each Other"

Nexus was designed as a personal leadership programme and is built on the assumption that there are unacknowledged personally-held obstacles that hold people and their organisations back from making the country move forward as a new democracy. In addition, it is assumed that the landscape and context of the country is constantly changing. Being able to *Lead Beyond Boundaries* (Nexus, 2017) is seen as the ability to respond to constant change, both

internationally and nationally, and to make progress in the complicated issues of personal, organisational and national life in an emerging democracy.

The outcomes of the programme as listed in the Nexus guidebook (2017, p. 3) are to

1. Deepen your self-awareness and personal mastery;
2. Be better equipped to see, and to interrogate, your own mental models and assumptions, and more open to the discomfort - and the gift - of 'not-knowing';
3. Be able to work constructively and creatively with diverse teams and stakeholders to understand and address pressing issues;
4. See greater potential in people and situations, especially in those you may have been prone to discount or dismiss;
5. Be willing and able to engage skilfully in the courageous conversations needed to move ourselves, our organisations and the country forward;
6. Think more critically about the issues affecting South Africa and the opportunities to leverage positive change;
7. Be connected to a passionate group of people who are committed to effecting positive change in South Africa; and
8. Believe more strongly in your own ability to be an agent of that change.

It is noteworthy that, in stating the programme outcomes, words and phrases such as 'self-awareness', 'mental models and assumptions', 'thinking critically', 'agent' and 'change' are part of the language used by Mezirow (1991b, 1994, 1995b, 1998a, 2000b, 2009), Cranton (2006b), Cranton and Taylor (2012), Dirkx (Dirkx, 2000; Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006), Taylor (Taylor, 1998, 2005, 2008, 2017; Taylor, Duveskog, & Friis-Hansen, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) and Tisdell (2008) in describing transformative learning.

The theory of transformative learning is described succinctly by Taylor (1998, p. 1) as "the process of making meaning of one's experiences", and by Mezirow (2000a, pp. 7-8) as

> the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action."

In Chapter 3 I give a fuller description of transformative learning theory.

The pedagogy of the Nexus programme is explained thus:

> We engage in a process of 'discovering together'. In this respect, the learning is built from the ground up. We start with your personal experience, expose you to additional input, converse with practitioners and then reflect collectively on what is needed to create a more positive future. (Nexus, 2017, p. 5)

Certainly during my time of involvement with the programme, the management team was not intentionally using the language of transformative learning theory, although this quote highlights a process of making meaning of one's experiences, responding through reflection to a new way of seeing things, and finally a call to action in response to the new meaning perspective.

This study makes a contribution to understanding the more holistic nature of learning on the Nexus programme. The aims of the programme include ideals such as self-understanding, challenging personal assumptions, developing critical thinking, and realising that there is a tension between one's own worldview and the perspectives of others. In addition, there is a call to action to create change that makes for a more equitable society. This study explored what is learnt, how this happens, and how this impacts on how people respond to societal needs as young business leaders. This research explored, in particular, how the pedagogy of the programme, that is, experiential learning journeys, storytelling, self-reflection and dialogue, played in impacting this learning.

1.4 Review of leadership literature

The literature on leadership is also reviewed in order to provide a means of engaging with the data collected from participants in this leadership programme. There is extensive literature on this phenomenon, and a myriad of theories. Because one of the outcomes of Nexus is to gain greater self-awareness and personal mastery, authentic leadership theory is explicated. Humanising leadership is also used as a lens because it provides the means to examine how the following outcomes of being able to work in a constructive and creative manner "with diverse teams to understand and address pressing issues … see greater potential in people

and situations, especially in those you may have been prone to discount or dismiss; [and to] think more critically about the issues affecting South Africa" (Nexus, 2017, p. 3) are achieved. The model of learning-leader provides a way to examine the outcomes of being able to skilfully enter into courageous conversations intended to effect positive change in the country, learning from others in order to more deeply understand the socioeconomic issues at play in South Africa, and to connect with passionate people committed to being or becoming change agents. Leadership is understood as being situated contextually, and based on relationships with others.

1.5 Transformative learning theory as an adult learning theory

This study employed Mezirow's transformative learning theory as its sole theoretical framework. I now describe, very briefly, some of the key points within Mezirow's transformative learning theory as an adult learning theory, and some of the emerging multiple ways of understanding the theory since its introduction. Mezirow, acknowledged as the originator of this theory, drew on contributions from several fields but in particular on the works of critical writers Jurgen Habermas and Paulo Freire. Mezirow invited and received many criticisms, which fits well with his ontological position of constructivism. As Mezirow (2000a) put it in his book title, transformative learning theory is "a theory in progress". Over the last nearly four decades the theory has evolved both in responding to various critiques, as well as refinements and additions by Mezirow and others.

Gunnlaugson (2005) has described the development of transformative learning theory as having three phases. The first phase was marked by early stage development lead by Mezirow, and critique of Mezirow's theorising. In the second phase broader theoretical conceptions of the theory led to fragmentation and diversification into integral, integrative and holistic interpretations of transformative learning theory. In Gunnlaugson's proposed third phase there is a move towards the development of a more unified theory, of seeing transformative learning theory as a metatheory or conceptual metaphor.

A long-lived and persistent critique of Mezirow's transformative learning theory is that Mezirow placed undue emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of transformative learning. Other writers have shown there are relational and affective dimensions present in transformative learning too. This research explored how to create opportunities for learning more holistically, and the impact of such learning.

Having provided some context of the Nexus programme and a brief overview of the theory that informed this study, I now introduce the key research questions that this study attempted to answer.

1.6 Key research questions

The four key questions answered by this research are

> What is the nature of learning in the Nexus programme?
>
> What roles, if any, do emotion and relationships play in Nexus participants' learning?
>
> How does learning in the Nexus programme relate to personal development, broader lives and histories of learners?
>
> How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to societal needs and leadership development?

These research questions were of an exploratory nature.

1.7 Research design

Data were gathered from participants drawn from different cohorts with consideration given to diversity with respect to gender, race and sector of work. The research questions could not be sufficiently answered through quantitative research. In order to gather 'unexpected' answers to how participants have experienced their learning on Nexus, how this learning may have impacted their personal, social and work lives, and what the participation on the programme meant in an experience-rich filled life, qualitative research was deemed the best fit.

This interpretivist study intended to uncover what impact, in a life already filled with lived experiences, Nexus had and continues to have on the programme participants, how and what it is that participants learnt, and how this impacted their personal, social and work lives.

In order to be able to theorise about learning on the Nexus programme, a case study approach with data from narratives, life stories and reflective assignments was used. Nexus is a case bound by time and place where the unit of analysis is the programme. Data were gathered in multiple forms: participants' stories; archival data such as programme evaluations, assignments, photographs, written and drawn records; readings provided by the Nexus programme management, email and other communications. Reports commissioned by the Programme Managers of Nexus on the impact of the Nexus programme were also a part of this dataset. In addition, data was collected from observations made during the Nexus programme over the course of a year in order to richly describe the context of the programme. The programme managers were interviewed for their insights about learning on Nexus.

Before embarking on the life stories phase, three focus groups were conducted. The participants of each focus group were drawn from various cohorts over time. Analysis of feedback obtained from the focus groups provided further in-depth questions to be asked of

six people in the life story interviews. This purposive sample of participants were interviewed in depth and questioned about their involvement in the programme, and what insights about their learning on Nexus still remain with them.

The study yielded abundant and rich data. Content analysis was conducted on the various documents, and data was categorised. The focus groups, interviews with programme managers, assignments and life stories were both deductively and inductively coded.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

The first chapter has introduced the thesis, and provided an overview of the reasons for this research, a description of the context of post-apartheid South Africa and how apartheid continues to exert socioeconomic influence in the contemporary world of work and society. The Nexus leadership programme is situated within the University of Pretoria's business school, and the rationale for classifying Nexus as nonformal adult learning was provided. Further it explained the research questions asked and the research design used.

Chapter 2 provides details of leadership theories used to discuss data in this study. Despite the fact that Nexus does not foreground or even assess the application of any leadership models in the programme, research participants made reference to new ways of enacting leadership. Informed by the learning outcomes espoused in the guidebook used in Nexus, this chapter deals with contextual and relational dimensions of leadership and then more fully explicates authentic leadership, humanising leadership and finally learning-leadership. The literature on leadership development has not been reviewed given that the focus of this thesis was on the outcomes of learning in the Nexus leadership programme, and not on how Nexus contributes to the field of leadership development. Leadership programmes at selected South African business schools at the time of data gathering are reviewed, and a brief reflection on the pedagogy of Nexus is provided.

Chapter 3 examines in some detail transformative learning theory, taking an historical view of its development since it was first introduced as a theory of adult learning in 1978. As has been stated earlier in this chapter, consideration is given to more recent conceptions of the theory in its integrated form, and also more focus on the outcomes of transformative learning. A model that summarises key moves in the development of this theory is presented.

Chapter 4 contains particulars of the research design of this study. The rationale for using a case study methodology in a qualitative research design is provided, as well as how the data were collected and analysed. Assurances of rigour and quality of research are explained.

Chapter 5 provides the thick and rich description of the case. Using a framework that focuses

on the programme structure, pedagogy of Nexus and description of Nexus participants, this chapter foregrounds the voices of the key protagonists in Nexus. In this chapter my voice is more muted and more akin to that of a narrator. Given that this is research in an interpretivist tradition, throughout the findings chapters I have made every attempt to report the data in ways that honours the voices of research informants. The chapter concludes with a section that discusses the various descriptions used by participants to explain what Nexus is.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 report on the findings of this research and theorise learning on Nexus, and the impact of this learning. Two of the four key research questions looked to explore the nature of learning on Nexus and then, in particular, if or how emotions and relationships affect this learning. This research also explored the impact of such learning on the broader lives of Nexus participants, and also how this learning may have impacted how Nexus participants' leadership is enacted, and their responses to broader societal issues. These three chapters are structured so as to answer the research questions, but the chapters have the following focal points: Chapter 6 develops a model of learning in Nexus from inductively coded data that used as a point of departure how participants explained the nature of their learning; Chapter 7 brings a theoretical lens to the data to analyse and then theorise the nature of learning, the role of emotions and relationships in such learning, and the impact of such learning on broader lives; and Chapter 8 theorises how learning on Nexus impacts a more inclusive form of leadership, and presents a model of learning that integrates the findings from chapters 6 to 8.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 9. This chapter closes the case by offering a brief summary of the findings and theorising of the nature of learning and its impact. The case is also left open through making suggestions for further research. Practical, methodological and theoretical contributions of this research are also discussed.

1.9 Summary

In this chapter I explained the broader socio-historical country context, particularly with reference to the racialisation project of South Africa under apartheid. The Nexus programme was introduced through the voice of a programme participant. A fairly detailed description of the Nexus programme is provided. I then briefly explained transformative learning theory and how this might serve as a lens to view learning experienced in Nexus. An explanation of the reason the leadership literature was reviewed was given. The key research questions were posed and the qualitative research design used was discussed. Finally, the organisation of the thesis chapters were outlined. In the next chapter I offer a review of selected leadership theories insofar as they provide a means for me to engage with the data in this research.

Chapter 2: Literature review on leadership

Nexus is a nonformal adult learning leadership programme in a Johannesburg-based business school which focuses on the South African context of leadership, where context requires meaning-making in a post-apartheid era. This research explores the nature of learning of Nexus participants, the particular pedagogic practices used in Nexus, as well as how learning on Nexus impacts participants' broader and professional lives following participation in the programme. This research also explored the question of how learning on the Nexus programme may relate to leadership development and societal needs. Literature on the fields of leadership and leadership pedagogies are reviewed in this chapter. Nexus has a particular pedagogy and this is the final focus in this chapter.

In this study, Nexus participants were asked to reflect on what they have learnt about leadership through their participation on this programme, and in the next part of this chapter I discuss where I position this research in the extensive and prolific leadership literature. Nexus stands out for its unique approach to teaching about leadership, so various approaches used by institutions of Higher Education when teaching leadership are summarised. Nexus breaks from these pedagogic practices. Three main pedagogic practices of the Nexus programme: experiential learning, critical reflection and dialogic learning are elucidated.

2.1 Leadership literature: making some sense of theories and models

The purpose of Nexus is to enable programme participants to "lead beyond boundaries" (Nexus, 2017, p. 6). The literature on leadership was reviewed in order to engage with the data in this research because research informants reflected on their understanding of leadership as a consequence of their exposure to, and reflections on, learning about leadership during Nexus. As someone who has no familiarity with this literature, but armed with my own life experiences of being led or leading others, I found the experience of trying to make sense of the field daunting. Biggart and Hamilton (1987, pp. 429 - 430) put it this way: leadership is a "phenomenon [that] is as theoretically elusive as it is empirically obvious" and "the tradition of leadership theories is matched by a tradition of critiques nearly as extensive and varied as the theories themselves."

The literature has a long history, and over the last 50 years has grown increasingly complex in an effort to theorise about what exactly constitutes leadership. In fact Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, and Cogliser (2010, p. 935), in their review of the last ten years of articles on theory in *The Leadership Quarterly*, found "that the past ten years have been a particularly fertile time for the development of new theories and perspectives on leadership." Criticisms of the field of research include factors such as lack of agreement on definitions of leadership (Osborn,

Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2004), construct redundancies and complexity (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016; Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011), theory proliferation, and ambiguity (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010; Osborn et al., 2002). In an examination of the development of theories of leadership, Glynn and Raffaelli (2010, p. 359) found a "general lack of commensuration or standards by which theories can be compared or synthesized", and Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015, p. 628) suggest that researchers of leadership "embrace our inability to fully understand — let alone theorize about — leadership" in their article on the pursuit of developing a humanising leadership.

In order to find a way of telling the story about leadership from an outsider's view, I have relied on the following key sources: Avolio et al. (2009); Gardner et al. (2010); Glynn and Raffaelli (2010); Hernandez et al. (2011); and Lowe and Gardner (2001). I do not intend to provide an extensive review of this literature but rather wish to focus on major aspects of leadership theory that are relevant to this study. In addition, my focus is on more recent theories. I have used a framework developed by Hernandez et al. (2011) to situate the three leadership theories discussed next, that of authentic, humanising and learning-leadership.

Hernandez et al. (2011) used two dimensions to plot the categorisation of leadership theories. This framework also reveals some of the historical development of leadership theories, which include the early 'great man' or trait theories, and behavioural theories that emerged in response to critiques of trait theory. Emerging from these two broad categories came contingency or situational theories and a cluster of theories that focused on the leader-follower dyadic relationship, or social exchange theories. Newer leadership theories were then proposed that included context and followers as the locus of leadership. Contemporary leadership theories proliferated and it is here that the framework proposed by Hernandez et al. (2011) becomes useful to situate the many emerging leadership theories.

The framework uses two dimensions: the source of where leadership emanates, i.e. the loci of leadership; and the actions or transmission of leadership, i.e. the mechanisms of leadership. They identify five loci and four mechanisms of leadership. The five loci are leader, context, follower, collective and dyad, and the four mechanisms are traits (to be), behaviour (to do), cognitive (to think) and affect (to feel). (See Hernandez et al. (2011) for a mapping of core leadership theories into a two dimensional framework.)

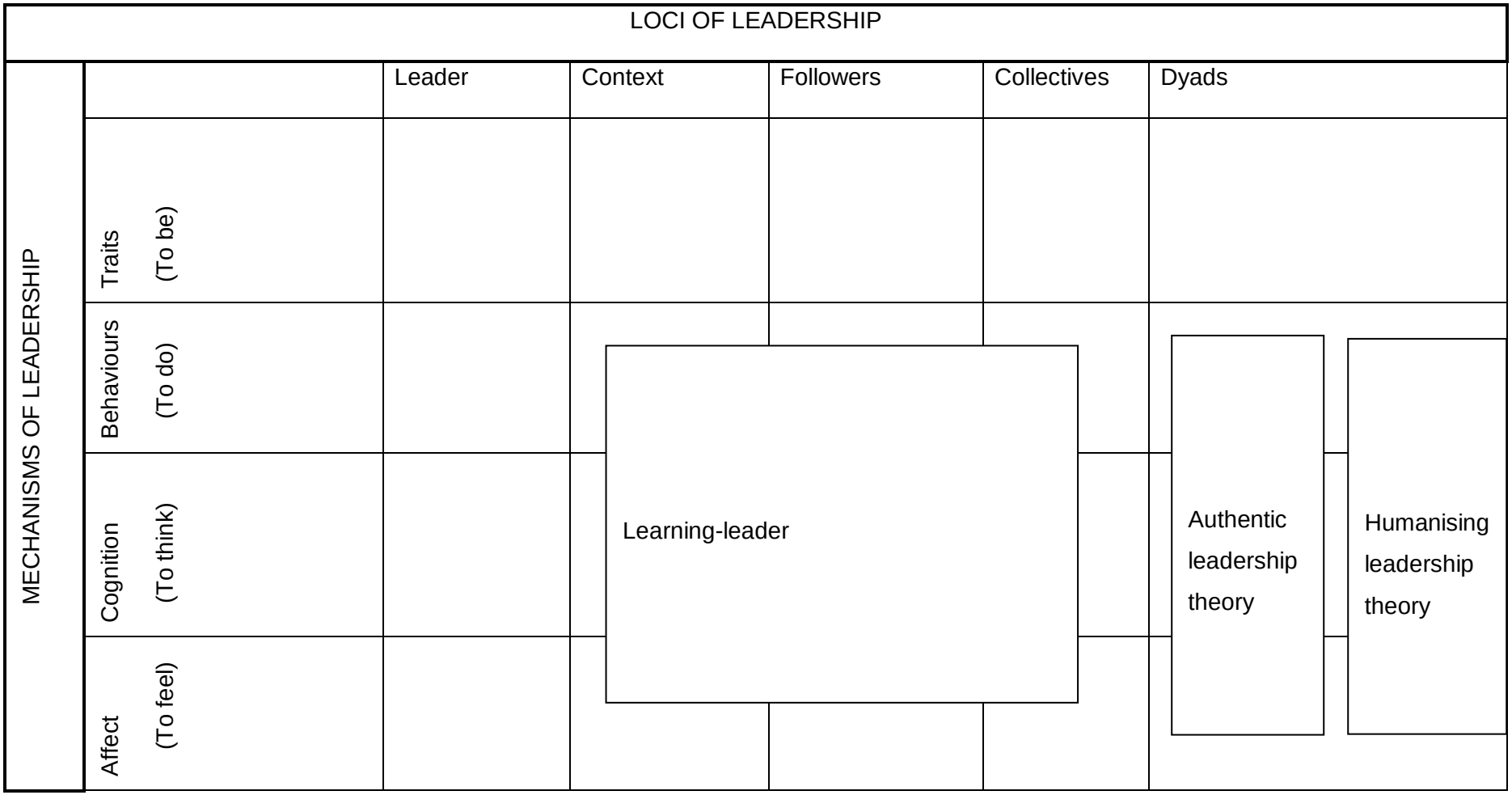


Figure 3. The loci and mechanisms of leadership (after Hernandez et al., 2011)

As stated earlier I focus on three particular theories of leadership, namely authentic, humanising and learning-leadership. I accept the invitation by Hernandez et al. (2011) not to use this framework as a 'steadfast map' but rather as a means to reflect on the loci and mechanisms of particular leadership models. See Figure 2 for the loci and mechanisms of humanising, authentic and learning-leadership.

Humanising and authentic leadership are both theories that focus on the leader-follower category and are thus situated in the dyad locus, given that "the emphasis on leadership [arises] from specific features of the relationship rather than unique partners in the relationship" (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1167). Hernandez et al. (2011) propose that authentic leadership is characterised by the behaviour, cognitive and affect mechanisms only, as is humanising leadership.

Learning-leadership focuses on context, followers and collectives. Context acts as a locus of leadership where it is the "'spring' that generates leadership" (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1167). Where followers are the locus of leadership, it is seen that the followers' unique characteristics and actions make leadership possible. Leadership that arises "from the interconnected relationships of people within a specific group of people" (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1167), thus a group-level phenomenon of leadership, is understood as collective locus of leadership. Learning-leadership thus originates from context, followers and collective loci, and the means by which leadership is enacted is through behaviour, cognitive and affect mechanisms.

The next section is introduced by leadership in context, because in post-apartheid South Africa context is a significant factor in learning about leadership. I then more fully explore authentic and humanising theories and the learning-leadership model. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004, p. 8), citing Deetz (1992), state that the function of theory is conception not definition, that "theory should direct attention and focus rather than characterize the intrinsic nature of stable objects or mirror fixed attributes among them." The theories I discuss below provide a means to engage with the data of my study through directing attention and creating focus.

2.1.1 Contextual influences on leadership

In making the case for theorising about leadership in context, Osborn et al. (2002, p. 799) state that it is not possible to "separate the leader(s) from the context any more than one can separate a flavor from a food." Biggart and Hamilton (1987, p. 437) hold that the embeddedness of leadership in "social and cultural values and beliefs" means that "leadership cannot be fully understood apart from the context in which it exists." Osborn et al. (2002, p. 832), focusing on the organisation as context, go on to say "'leadership' is an emerging social construction embedded in a unique organization—it is contextual leadership." Inclusion of the

broader societal context led them to state that “leadership is embedded in the context. It is socially constructed in and from a context where patterns over time must be considered and where history matters. Leadership is … the collective incremental influence of leaders in and around the system” (Osborn et al., 2002, p. 798). Thus context has spatial and temporal dimensions. For leaders in South Africa this has significant implications, given the lingering effects of apartheid.

Recently there is substantial acknowledgement that the context in which leader, followers and their relationship is situated, the leadership context, has been understudied, marginalised or is even missing from the literature (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1165; Lowe & Gardner, 2001, p. 496; Pawar & Eastman, 1997, p. 81). This review of leadership literature goes some way to addressing this shortcoming, particularly through its focus on the situation of the leader and relationships between leader and followers.

Leadership in context has thus become a new focus of studies (Hernandez et al., 2011) but research shows an emphasis on organisational settings’ contexts (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010, p. 369; Lowe & Gardner, 2001; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006), not socio-political, socio-historic or socio-economic contexts. A few studies have considered how followers view certain types of leaders in a given social or cultural context (Glynn & Raffaelli, 2010, p. 391; Lowe & Gardner, 2001, p. 498), and some have looked at the environmental factors giving rise to leadership, but again within an organisational setting (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1170). Where the societal context is acknowledged it is with regard to national cultural norms. “Although context is pervasive in organizational phenomena, it has largely been neglected in leadership research. Indeed, only 16% of the scholarly articles on leadership in a recent review emphasized [organisational] context” (Hernandez et al., 2011, p. 1176). Porter and McLaughlin (2006, p. 574) advocate that “future research … should help to provide a more nuanced and textured – indeed, more sophisticated – understanding of how leadership operates within organizational settings.” Bryman, Stephens, and Campo (1996, p. 356) call for understanding leadership in a wide range of contexts, and across varied settings such as social movements, NGOs, community and political leaders. This research examines how participants report on how their leadership operates both within organisational settings as well as in a broader societal setting.

For leaders in South Africa, there are socio-historic, socio-economic and socio-political factors in addition to organisational contextual factors that impact on their leadership. Organisational contextual factors include factors such as the organisation’s situational strength, environment, life-cycle stage, technology and tasks, structure, culture and mode of governance, leadership levels and distance from followers (Shamir & Howell, 1999), goals, composition of people, state, and time (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006), patterns of attention, volatility and complexity

(stability, crisis, dynamic equilibrium and edge of chaos) (Osborn et al., 2002), and the organisation's efficiency and adaptive capacity, and core and boundary-spanning units (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Given that South Africa is a country in transition, and by extension a society in transition, South African organisational leadership is impacted by a broader societal context. Factors such as the imperative to transform organisations and society, fostering a more inclusive society through social investment and black economic empowerment add to the complexity of the context in which a South African leader must lead (Binedell, 2014). This research contributes to studies of leadership in this broader country-in-transition context.

Biggart and Hamilton (1987, p. 439) link leadership, context and relationship in their claim that "leadership is a relationship among persons embedded in a social setting at a given historic moment. Strategies of leadership must consider the normative basis of the relationship and the setting, and the distinctive performance abilities of the actors involved." The model of leadership in context is important given that the South African context is marked by deep divisions, misunderstandings and hurt. It is a society characterised by exclusion and great inequality. The basis for normative relationships between groups of previously separated people is still being developed in family, community and work settings.

2.1.2 Discussion of authentic leadership, humanising leadership, and leadership as learning

In this next section I loosely use a framework suggested by Hunt (cited by Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 331) to discuss the purpose, definition, and relational aspects of authentic and humanising leadership, and learning as leadership. Authentic leadership theory was selected because the focus is on how the leader develops a sense of self, sense of self-as-leader, and also as leader-in-relation with others. Humanising leadership, on the other hand, views leadership as a process of working with the full humanness of others in their full socially-embedded selves in order to achieve a collective outcome. Where leadership is understood to be driven by a collective and democratic meaning-making endeavour which arises sometimes out of the context or sometimes through followers, the learning-leadership model provides a lens to view this form of leadership.

2.1.3 Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership theory is a recent leadership theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 93). It draws on positive, social and cognitive psychology, leadership and ethics scholarship (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008). The theory was developed in response to what is seen as widespread unethical business practices, malfeasance in the workplace (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 90), a flouting of the market rules to the detriment of

society (Fotaki & Prasad, 2015, p. 557) and a lack of prosocial leadership.

Purpose of authentic leadership

The purpose of authentic leadership is to achieve positive and enduring organisational outcomes such as providing meaning and connection at work, improved self-awareness, the building of optimism, hope and transparent relationships, instilling decision-making practices that lead to the building of trust, the fostering of inclusive structures and a positive ethical climate (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2005). In short, authentic leadership leads to the creation of ethically and socially responsible business and "help[s] people find meaning and connection in their work" (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012, p. 118)

Defining authentic leadership

In order to define authentic leadership it is necessary to first define the term authenticity whilst at the same time acknowledging that the term itself is also open to many nuances of meaning. Ilies et al. (2005) reference the Greek term *eudaimonic*, being true to self, in their description of authenticity. Authenticity is defined as self-knowledge and an acceptance of self in the full sense of knowing i.e. being discerning about one's weaknesses and strengths, values and beliefs. Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012, p. 119) expand the definition of authenticity in leadership to include "being true to 'self-in-relationship' … [and] to 'self *and* world'" (italics in original) thus defining authenticity as both a relational and contextual concept.

Kernis (as cited in Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 93) states that authentic people have high levels of self-esteem, and a demeanour marked by stability. They are free of defensive biases and are comfortable in forming close relationships which are based on transparency and openness. Their behaviours and actions are congruent with their values and beliefs. Authentic leaders have these qualities and demonstrate a high level of self-regulated internalised processes. They are not driven by inducements, threats, rewards or extrinsic expectations (Deci & Ryan, as cited in Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 93).

One of the issues debated in the literature is whether or not authentic leadership includes a moral and ethical imperative, and whether there is an implied developmental agenda for this imperative. The more debated point is around the question of the inclusion of morality in the definition of authentic leadership (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). According to Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012, p. 125) no two people may necessarily be aligned as to what they hold as ethical or moral. In contrast, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) argue that authentic leaders by definition must possess a high moral character. In using this point to dismiss the argument

put forward by Sparrowe (2005) that narcissistic and dysfunctional leaders may well be authentic, Walumbwa et al. (2008, p. 94) then argue that any authentic leadership development has to include an "increased awareness and attention to the inherent ethical responsibilities that reside in the leadership role." I agree that any leadership development has to include ethical responsibilities inherent in leadership, but question whether an authentic leader, by definition, is necessarily ethical. I will return to this point later in this section.

Taking all the debates and developments into account, Walumbwa et al. (2008, p. 94) offer this helpful definition of authentic leadership:

> Specifically, we define authentic leadership as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development.

Whilst the definition of Walumbwa et al. (2008) focuses on leader behaviour, its source and the effect on the organisation, Shamir and Eliam's (2005) focus is on the development of the 'self' of the leader, a more inward looking definition. They write

> Our concept of authentic leaders implies that authentic leader development has four components:
>
> 1. Development of a leader identity as a central component of the person's self-concept.
> 2. Development of self-knowledge and self-concept clarity, including clarity about values and convictions.
> 3. Development of goals that are concordant with the self-concept.
> 4. Increasing self-expressive behavior, namely consistency between leader behaviors and the leader's self-concept.
>
> (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 399)

In addition, Shamir and Eliam (2005) ascribe the leader's effectiveness not on the basis of morality and ethicality, but rather on whether or not their leadership is authentic or not. They write that leaders who are authentic and

> possess a psychologically central leader identity, have self-concordant goals and high self-concept clarity, and express themselves in their leadership role are more likely than inauthentic leaders to find the inner strength and internal compass to support them and guide them when dealing with their challenges. (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 400)

What is not clear in this description of authentic leadership is whether there is an assumption that the internal compass necessarily steers the leader towards making morally and ethically sound decisions. I concur with Sparrowe (2005) that authentic leaders may be dysfunctional leaders, but authentic nevertheless. However, it appears that the literature on the theory of authentic leadership includes this desired state, that of leaders who are true to self and mindful of the development needs of others, and who are capable of making ethical decisions. The remainder of this section includes these dimensions.

Authentic leadership theory is marked by intrinsic complexity, is multi-dimensional and a multi-level phenomenon (Avolio et al., 2009). Algera and Lips-Wiersma (2012, p. 121) warn that authentic leadership should not become a technique to be developed in a few individuals in the organisation but rather be seen as a human quality that is understood by all in the organisation. Many leadership development programmes have an emphasis on the leader, but for authentic leadership to succeed it must encompass all in the leader-follower context. Authentic, ethical leadership encourages followers to be authentic and ethical as well.

My definition of authentic leadership builds on a robust sense of self, relational and contextual dimensions. An authentic leader understands that leadership is a central part of their identity, is prepared to challenge and reflect on their deeply-held values and beliefs especially insofar as it leads to ethical decisions, is willing to take into account their organisational and social environment when making decisions, and foster authenticity as a lived value in all their relationships.

Relational aspects and authentic leadership

Authentic leadership is a relational concept (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012, p. 120). The theory is founded on open and positive exchanges between leader and follower. Authentic leadership fosters inclusive structures, a positive ethical climate, authentic relationships built on trust, openness, guidance toward worthy objectives, and has a strong emphasis on follower development (Gardner et al., 2005).

The model of authentic leadership development requires that the hard work of leadership begins first with the leader in developing deep self-knowledge. It also involves the leader critically reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions that dominate neoliberal capitalism.

2.1.4 Humanising leadership

In this section I draw on an article by Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) who pose the question about whether it is possible for business schools to humanise leadership. I have drawn from this article a model of what I understand humanising leadership to be. The roots of this model lie in psychology and sociology, as well as adaptive leadership and social identity theory.

Purpose of humanising leadership

Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) hold the view that business schools teach about leadership as either a set of skills to be mastered or personal virtues to be modelled, instead of viewing leadership as identity work. Identity work is understood to be that work which is done by individuals to create a coherent self-concept through "crafting, protecting and modifying their views of themselves, as well as gaining social validation for these views" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 45). This tie to leadership as identity work has strong links to the focus on self as described in authentic leadership, but in humanising leadership this self-concept is deeply embedded in community and context.

Using the concept of splitting, which is "an unconscious defense mechanism that involves compartmentalizing complex experiences to protect oneself from the cognitive ambiguity or emotional ambivalence that these experiences provoke", Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015, p. 634) argue that it is the separation of leadership from its social context, and "the segregation of instrumental and expressive aspects of leadership" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 634) that leads to dehumanising leadership. In the case of separating leadership from its social context, the defence mechanism protects against having to deal with claims to leadership in a fluid, complex, diverse and fragmented workplace. Segregating instrumental aspects (the functional and measurable dimensions of leadership) from the expressive (feelings and knowledge of hurt caused by certain decisions) protects the leader from having to either reconcile the two, or from recognising that they are in fact irreconcilable.

Humanising leadership therefore acknowledges that leadership is ambiguous, uncertain, contextual, sometimes precarious and dynamic. In addition, it recognises that leadership is idiosyncratic, localised and embedded, and that the role of the leader is to both represent and influence the group or organisation they lead. To ignore the fact that leadership is tied to "identity, community and context" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 627) results in leadership being seen as a set of a-contextual skills to be acquired and then used in any other setting, instead of the embedded and embodied nature of leadership. Humanising leadership entails leaders examining the meaning of leadership in the circumstances of their own lives, context and society, and acknowledging that leadership is more than a set of skills or a function of

virtue.

Defining humanising leadership

Dehumanisation is the denial of the humanness of another. Haslam (2006) proposes that dehumanisation takes two forms: that which denies what is uniquely human (UH) about a person, or that which denies their human nature (HN). The denial of human uniqueness manifests as seeing others as being animalistic and thus coarse, amoral, irrational or childlike. On the other hand, denying another's human nature means that they are viewed as mechanistic, demonstrated by characteristics of inertness, coldness, superficiality, apathy and lack of emotions. A leader who views their followers through a mechanistic dehumanised framework expects them to be conformists who are expected to display efficiency, rigidity, predictability, regularity and a lack of spontaneity.

The central question that Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) ask about how business schools teach leadership links to one of these two forms of dehumanisation. Reducing the teaching of leadership to a set of skills to be used in any generic context runs the risk of having the leader develop an unconscious mechanistically-oriented form of dehumanisation. Leaders may become emotionally distant from and indifferent to the members of the group they lead, given that these skills are to be employed in a context marked by standardisation and conformity.

In South Africa the legacy of apartheid lingers in a myriad of ways but plays out noticeably in the form of racial slurs, amongst other manifestations of separateness and exclusion. Haslam (2006) notes that interactions between groups of people marked by degradation, humiliation, contempt, anger and disgust are indications of animalistic dehumanisation. In the apartheid project it was necessary to maintain the status quo through viewing those 'other than White' through a lens of less-than-human or non-human, and to "implicitly [liken them] to unrefined animals" (Haslam, 2006, p. 258). Whilst apartheid could be overturned politically, the assumptions about those deemed Other remain, maintaining a form of social apartheid to this day. It involves deep self-work for leaders to surface and critically reflect on these unchallenged and invisible assumptions, to understand that part of the leadership mandate in South Africa is to both acknowledge this form of dehumanisation as well as to restore human dignity to all. This form of humanising leadership could be termed re-humanising leadership: the difficult work of undoing past 'truths' and finding the humanity in oneself first.

Humanising leadership is defined as a form of leadership that accepts that the leader and followers are deeply embedded - historically, socially, politically and economically - in their context, and that each person is embodied by being both uniquely human as well as having full human nature. To view leadership this way means that the leader acknowledges that the

nature of leadership is marked by the constant interaction between "identity, community and context" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 627), and that leadership happens in dynamic and ambiguous situations, complete with relational dynamics and emotional dilemmas.

Relational aspects and humanising leadership

Humanising leadership adds to the leadership literature by a rediscovery that "the ties between leadership and identity and recovering traditional conceptualizations of leadership [are] embodied in history, physicality, relationships, and culture" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 636). Instead of focusing attention on the leader's influence and power on followers, there is a redirecting towards the dynamic relationship between the leader and follower. At the heart of humanising leadership lies relationship, and Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) contend that this aspect of relationship has either been dismissed or downplayed in the literature.

Given that leadership is a psychologically and socially richly-constructed phenomenon, there is a strong presence of dilemmas, contradictions, doubts, changes of mind and ambiguity in the experience of leading. Teaching about leadership runs the danger of either denying this reality, or of pretending that tensions between these experiences in leadership, whilst at the same time still meeting organisational imperatives, can be resolved: the 'splitting' referred to in the introduction to humanising leadership.

Humanising leadership embraces the scrutiny of the emotional and social dimensions of leaders and followers and that leadership is an "ongoing, relational, and dynamic process" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 636). It requires identity work by both leaders and followers, and that each individual craft, revise and experiment with their identity in relation to the group's identity. In South Africa there is a greater need for this identity work to resonate with what it means to be a citizen of the world. Identity work includes holding one's history, experiences and aspirations, whilst acknowledging the group's needs and expectations. For those living in post-apartheid South Africa it is this very history that must be re-examined insofar as it impacts our understanding of the present.

A focus on the relationship of the dynamic that exists between leaders and followers means that relational aspects include a recognition of, toleration for, and respect for the ambiguity and tensions that exist in leadership. At the core of humanising leadership is the relationship between leaders and followers. There is a recognition that the relationship is dynamic, and that identities of leader and follower evolve and develop over time (DeRue, 2011).

It was important to review the literature on authentic and humanising leadership as these theories offer a means to interpret the data given the identity-work and self-in-community work expected of Nexus participants. But equally, as I have pointed out in the section on the context

of leadership, leadership in the South African context is marked by calls for greater inclusion and for a redressing of past norms, which means that leaders have to pay particular attention to the society in which they operate. Binedell (2014, p. 5) situates the authentic and humanising leader in context when he writes

> all leaders essentially learn to lead in two different and equally important ways. The first is that they have to find their own rhythm and come to terms with their own values; they have to understand their own style and the contribution they can make. At the same time, that style and approach have to find fertile ground at the right place and at the right time.

Whilst authentic leadership places the focus of attention on the leader 'knowing my self', and 'knowing myself as leader', humanising leadership focuses on the dynamic interplay between self, community and people within an organisation. Perhaps a model of leadership that could explain how the 'leader-self' works with 'human others in context' is that of learning-leadership, discussed in the next section.

2.1.5 Learning-leadership

Adult education theorists Preskill and Brookfield (2008) propose a model of leadership which places learning at the centre as the driver of leadership. They identify five leadership theories that serve as the foundation of what they have identified as learning-leadership. It should be noted that Preskill and Brookfield call their model of leadership 'learning leadership' without the hyphen. This thesis deals with learning about leadership and so to avoid confusion I use a hyphenated form to describe the learning-leader. These five models are transformational, symbiotic, developmental, servant and organic leadership. This cluster of leadership theories has in common a

> commitment to, and practice of, learning. A capacity to learn from experience; desire to explore new areas of knowledge and practice; readiness to critique, revise, and sometimes even abandon past assumptions in light of new events or insights; and concern for the learning of members as the most important purpose of an organization, community or movement – these things are what make learning a way of leading. (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008, p. 14)

While there is congruence with mainstream leadership literature on Preskill and Brookfield's definitions of transformational and servant leadership, their other leadership theories have been drawn from the works of Matusak (*Finding your voice: Learning to lead … anywhere you*

want to make a difference, 1997) for symbiotic leadership, from the 1997 book by Belenky, Bond and Weinstock (*A tradition that has no name*) for developmental leadership, and the Italian political activist Antonio Gramsci for organic leadership.

Preskill and Brookfield (2008, p. ix) draw on leadership lessons offered by social activists, using the lens of "how leaders learn, how they support other people's learning, and how all of this deepens their social impact." They argue that learning-leaders constantly learn from the world around them not only because of the pleasure they derive from learning, but also because such leadership through learning advances justice and promotes the common good.

Purpose of learning-leadership

Learning leadership theory shifts the focus of attention away from the leader's authority, traits and behaviours to an emphasis on how learning can drive leadership. Thus the learning process within leadership contexts is foregrounded. Such leadership is democratic where anyone in the organisation can practice leadership and the leadership role is constantly rotating and displays 'power-with', that is, leadership marked by an absence of hierarchy, bureaucracy or positional authority.

Learning-leaders demonstrate their leadership by constantly searching for new information, fresh understanding and expanded comprehension. They do this through attentive listening, keen observation and through reading broadly and critically. There is a continual interplay between what they have learned, the issues at hand and the goals they are trying to achieve. Learning-leaders are enthusiastic about what they have learned, and eagerly share what they have heard or seen or read, what new ideas have been generated or what new connections they have made, and how earlier ideas and practices may need revision because of new learning. Such leaders also hold the view that leading, learning and teaching are not the lone preserve of the leader.

Defining learning-leadership

According to Preskill and Brookfield (2008), learning-leadership has nine learning tasks associated with this form of leadership. These tasks include learning how to: be open; be critically reflective; support the development of others; develop collective leadership; analyse experiences; question self and others; learn democracy; sustain hope in the midst of struggle; and, finally, create community. In defining learning-leadership, I will concentrate on the learning tasks of how to be open, critically reflective, to question self and others and analyse experiences. The remaining learning tasks are discussed as part of the following section on relational aspects and learning-leadership.

Preskill and Brookfield (2008) assert that the foundation of learning-leadership is learning how

to be open, a deep-seated willingness to consider a variety of perspectives, and to be receptive to contributions from all, irrespective of the person's status or accomplishments. Learning-leaders believe that every person has something valuable to teach. They create opportunities where contributions are invited, which are deemed valuable when they lead to deeper thinking, bolder actions and more creativity. Learning-leaders suspend their own judgements and hold assumptions in check in order to fully hear others when they are speaking. They also expect this of others and will temper dominant voices and invite contributions from quieter voices. They listen carefully, especially to understand experiences and reasoning that underpin contentious views. But in listening with care they may also confront unacknowledged biases and challenge obvious self-interest within the group. These leaders also make a conscious effort to talk less in order to listen better to others.

Learning-leaders understand that creating dialogic open spaces must exist in order "to make room for many voices and opinions" (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008, p. 21), but also realise the converse need for dialogic safe spaces. Dialogic safe spaces "are spaces in the building where people can huddle with allies, free of surveillance, to challenge prevailing agendas and resulting interpretations" (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008, p. 23). In the Nexus programme participants are divided into working groups of about eight people, and meet once a month to 'huddle with their allies' in closed rooms in order to hear the stories of others and to deepen their understanding of what they experienced during the experiential learning journeys. Working groups have all the hallmarks of a dialogic safe space.

In the next chapter I will explain more fully what Mezirow (1990) means when he refers to critical self-reflection, but Preskill and Brookfield (2008) ascertain that critical reflection is one of the learning tasks in learning-leadership. Both Preskill and Brookfield hold that critical reflection is inherently normative, that is, grounded in a set of desirable values. They do not believe that critical reflection should, for example, be used to justify institutionalised racism. Brookfield interprets critical reflection from a critical theory perspective in order to understand power and hegemony. Preskill, on the other hand, views critical reflection as part of the process of acknowledging and enhancing the humanity of others. In humanising others Preskill understands that his co-workers are enabled to act freely, creatively, compassionately, to communicate clearly, to make the most of their abilities, to think expansively about their challenges, and to take risks. Whilst the similarities to humanising leadership are noted, in learning-leadership the focus is on what is being learnt.

Critically reflective leaders are interested in the pursuit of justice, equity, power sharing, mutual growth and inclusion. They allow people to act with their own sense of agency and, where necessary, to challenge persistent ideologies such as racism or patriarchy. These leaders

are, on the basis of individual and collective wisdom, able to change their practices. Their actions are informed by constant critical reflections of assumptions.

The learning task of learning-leaders, that of analysing experience, has emancipatory possibilities. Preskill and Brookfield (2008, p. 123) explain the emancipatory potential thus: "Once people learn how to learn from their own and other people's experiences, there is virtually no limit to the learning that can happen after they return to their own community." Experience in and of itself does not create learning: learning only happens once the experience is probed for meaning. Probing for meaning can be done individually or in a group. Preskill and Brookfield (2008) hold that group analysis of experience results in deeper learning. With a diversity of perspectives and myriad histories, the potential to compare and contrast experiences, to probe for where experiences are the same or different results in improved understanding and helps to make connections between people.

Events happen, and the consequent experiences are the result of the construction of meaning from these events. Thus experiences can be ambiguous, multifaceted and open to contradictory interpretations. In order to embark on sense-making of experiences, telling the story of these events is a powerful means to get a glimpse into a person's personal and social context. Storytelling is never a quick process, stories touch listeners in a personal way and, for learning-leaders, form the basis of the curriculum that is being studied. Telling personal stories is highly demanding in terms of thinking, listening and reflecting. Stories can be highly emotionally charged and may be painful, hurtful or embarrassing to recount. But the process of telling stories allows all to embark on a study of issues or conditions of constraints: stories may reveal privilege or prejudice, powerfulness or powerlessness, wealth and poverty, inclusion and exclusion. Whilst stories may lead to conflict, the purpose of telling the stories is an invitation to more deeply understand the issues at hand. Stories have the potential, too, to reveal the commonality of certain issues, and to deal with emotional and mental blind spots, what Cranton (2006a) terms "unexamined assumptions".

Learning to question is a learning task for leaders who want to start people wondering about what they know and believe, to get people to think in new ways about issues and problems that have no easy solutions. The right question can shake people out of conventional thinking, deepen their understanding and aid them in envisioning new possibilities. Learning to question is both about the type and quantum of questions asked. Learning-leaders remain curious about other people and their thinking. They may ask the person to restate an idea, or explain further, and in so doing they signal that they care about what the person thinks, and also that their idea is potentially significant. This also serves the purpose of making the recipient of the questions feel empowered and affirmed. Questions serve to open new lines of enquiries and

unorthodox ways of solving issues at hand.

For the leader, the power of learning to question indicates that the leader does not necessarily hold all the answers, that there is a wisdom to draw on from others. Asking questions can provide the means to critique and assess shared accomplishments, and has the power to transform through indicating willingness to address the status quo. Questions serve to drive a discussion on values, goals and actions, but also aid in knowledge sharing.

Thus a learning-leader is a leader defined by an insatiable curiosity about others, about issues and about context. To this end, the leader requires that she not be at the forefront of holding the knowledge and means of solving problems. She or he invites others to participate in open dialogic spaces, and uses questions to drive critical reflections. She or he is willing to use storytelling as a means of interrogating experiences. Above all, a learning-leader remains a constant learner from others.

Relational aspects and learning-leadership

Learning-leadership has "a great deal to do with forming and sustaining relationships that lead to results in the common interest" (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008, p. 4). Relationship is at the heart of learning-leadership. A learning-leader understands the importance of openness, leading through democratic means, creating hope, embracing collective leadership and a commitment to supporting the growth of others. Learning-leadership holds the assumption that people are creative, imaginative problem-solvers and that all people have both the right as well as the responsibility to lead.

The promotion of openness, that is, being open to the contributions of others and affirming them for these contributions, develops a sense of belonging. There is a willingness to hear the other out despite contentious views. A learning-leader, through critically moderated hope, creates a climate of possibility for all in the organisation. There is motivation for creating transformative change, and a sense that it is possible to make a difference.

A learning-leader also focuses on the need for democratic leadership through being inclusive, encouraging of a broad base of involvement by including diversity of people and perspectives. Such a leader "struggle[s] against ideologies that exclude disenfranchised groups from full and equal participation in social life" (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008, p. 150).

Collective leadership is also the stamp of learning-leadership. The shared vision from the group is the consequence of debate and analysis within the group and a decision about what course of action should be followed. There is also an assumption that anyone within the group can act as the spokesperson, and that this spokesperson may be recalled and replaced by another from within the group. In collective leadership all members are committed to

implementing the work, and this work is done interdependently. Everyone is active in the group, and there is free and full participation. In collective leadership ideas are paramount, not the person or persons who offered the ideas.

Another feature of learning-leadership is the commitment to developing others. Such a leader holds the view that all people have talent, experiences, creativity and a desire to make a difference. It recognises the needs of the marginalised. Developing others is fuelled by the practices of dialogue: the leader listens well, asks constructive questions, responds appropriately and appreciatively, learns from the stories of others and looks to find common ground.

Woven together, authentic leadership, humanising leadership and learning-leadership could fit well with what Uhl-Bien (2006) describes as relational leadership. Uhl-Bien holds that rather than authority, superiority or dominance, it is relationships that are key in leadership. Relational leadership allows a focus on "processes that are not just about the quality of relationship or even the type of relationship, but rather about the social dynamics by which leadership relationships form and evolve in the workplace" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 672).

Having reviewed in detail three theories of leadership and suggested that together this cluster of theories could be deemed to be relational leadership, the next section deals with how institutions of higher learning in South Africa teach leadership. I first explain the sampling method for selecting these particular institutions and then review the leadership programmes of these institutions based on an internet search.

2.2 Leadership programmes

The field of leadership studies is extensive as are the number of institutions offering leadership development workshops, studies or qualifications. In this subsection of the chapter I focus on leadership development programmes offered by South African institutions. The analysis of the various leadership programmes was done at the time of data collection in 2015 and 2016.

South Africa has 11 traditional universities, one university offering distance education, eight comprehensive universities and six universities of technology (CHE, 2015). Of these 26 variously classified universities, only two do not have a separate business school. Four of the eight comprehensive universities have separate business schools, and only Tshwane University of Technology has a separate business school. In addition, there are many private institutions registered with the Department of Higher Education (DHET). According to this register, published by DHET (2017), 27 of these offer business management and leadership qualifications or workshops.

Given the range of opportunities open to those wanting to study leadership, and the range of institutions offering leadership development, I have selected six institutions, and provide a brief review of various leadership courses and, where information is available on the website, note pedagogical practices for the various programmes. The following institutions were chosen, and the reasons for selection are given:

The universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and Pretoria are all globally ranked (QS World University Rankings, 2017; Times Higher Education, 2017; University Ranking by Academic Performance, 2017) according to their academic outputs, and are amongst the top five ranked in South Africa. In addition, their business schools, Graduate School of Business (GSB), University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB), Wits Business School (WBS), and Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) are the top four ranked business schools ("Eduniversal Business Schools Ranking. Business schools ranking in South Africa," 2017), and are locally recognised by employers and students as offering valuable return on their investment in people development (Furlonger, 2016). The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) is also one of the top five ranked universities in South Africa, but its business school does not enjoy local positive reputation. It is for this reason that I have excluded UKZN from this sample.

South Africa's largest distance higher education institution, University of South Africa or UNISA, has been included in this review because of the large number of students studying through this single institution. According to CHE (2015), UNISA has 40 000 registered students which is just less than half the total number of students, 83 000, registered at traditional universities. UNISA's business school is also the only institution that offers a Master of Business Leadership.

Henley Business School, affiliated to Henley Business School in the United Kingdom (UK), has been selected on the basis of international rankings and local reputation.

See Table 3 for a summary of various programmes which have a leadership focus or dimension offered by these business schools. I have reported on short courses, also called executive education, the postgraduate diploma and master qualifications and in each of these draw particular attention to the leadership component. These data have been drawn from the various business school websites and, where reference to the teaching methods is recorded, I have listed these against pedagogic practices used in leadership development.

In summary from this sample of leadership programmes offered at a section of South African business schools, a diversity of pedagogic practices can be ascertained: case studies, lectures, class discussions, tutorials, readings, coaching and mentoring, group and individual

assignments, peer feedback, action learning or applied learning in the workplace, reflective learning, experiential learning and, in a few instances, leader-led sessions. The predominant focus of these courses is on the development of skills and competencies of the leader herself, and it is this privileging of power that Collinson and Tourish (2015) say calls for teaching leadership more critically.

The emergent field of critical leadership studies (CLS) questions the premise that “leadership is fundamentally about the effective or ineffective exercise of power, authority, and influence” (Collinson & Tourish, 2015, p. 577). Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) offer a definition of the role of the leader as that person who both embodies and represents the group’s identity, and they see leadership as both a personalised and contextualised activity. Critiques of leadership teaching are based on evidence of exclusionary practices and destructive globalisation and, in challenging this dominant paradigm, Coetzee (2011) holds that it is possible to envision teaching a form of leadership that embraces a world of inclusive globalisation. There are myriad calls for changing teaching about leadership to ensure more inclusive, ethical and responsible practices.

Table 3 *Review of leadership programmes offered at selected South African business schools (based on several ranking systems)*

University	**Business School**	**Executive Education or Short Courses**	**Leadership focus and pedagogic practices**	**Academic NQF 8**	**Leadership focus and pedagogic practices**	**Academic NQF 9**	**Leadership focus and pedagogic practices**
Cape Town	GSB	Lean Leadership Executive Women in Leadership Developing Women in Leadership	Role of leader in the organisation Socio-technical orientation PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Theory Practice through real-play Experiential Consciousness Toolkit Buddy-learning	Post-graduate Diploma (PG Dip)	Core course on leadership: values-based leadership; transformative leadership; innovative leadership PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES None noted	MBA	16 courses of which 3 focus on leadership: Organisations, leadership and values (various leadership theories including values-based and toxic leadership) Organisational behaviour and people management ("The challenges of leading and managing people in (South) Africa" http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/mba-curriculum) Leadership and personal development (creative leadership)

University	Business School	Executive Education or Short Courses	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 8	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 9	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices
Pretoria	GIBS	Leader as mentor Leader as facilitator Leadership Acceleration Programme Leading Women Spirit of Youth Nexus	Focus on practice of mentoring Experiential approach PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Reflections Workshops Coaching 360 feedback Academic instruction Diversity dialogues Dialogue Experiential learning	PDBA	9 core courses of which one “Human Behaviour and Performance” may be leadership-focused	MBA	10 core courses of which one focuses on leadership

University	Business School	Executive Education	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 8	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 9	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices
Reading (UK)	Henley SA	None listed with leadership focus		PG Dip PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Immersive learning experience Action leaning	Core module 1 of 5: Managing values streams – includes diversity and inclusion, values-driven leadership, concepts, theories and models of leadership Outcome – understand and develop leadership capabilities Personal mastery Position papers Case studies Reflective papers Group work Final presentation Systems thinking framework. Experiential learning Action learning	Masters Executive MBA (EMBA)	Management competencies Business environments Theory (academic rigour) Practice (Practitioner relevance) Module 1 Fundamental business foundations - Leadership and personal development Module 3 Taking leadership to a higher level – Leadership and change PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Experiential learning environment Flexible learning programme Face-to-face learning team activities On- and off-line individual and group self-study programme Application in own working environment

University	Business School	Executive Education	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 8	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 9	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices
Stellenbosch	USB	Executive Development Programme Senior Managers Development Programme Managers Development Programme New Managers Development Programme Management Programme for NPOs Conversations for Women in Leadership Series Development of Leadership and Team Skills Programme in Leadership	Varying number of core focus areas of which leadership is one PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Individual assignments Business Driven Action Learning project Learning process facilitator facilitates action learning through application of knowledge, analysis and synthesis	PG Dip in Leadership Development PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES	7 compulsory modules and 1 elective Dimensions of leadership development: ME-WE-WORK-WORLD Compulsory modules Personal authentic leadership High impact leadership and teaming Multi-culturism, transformation and competitiveness Role of business in society Theory and practice Experiential learning Lectures, case studies, tutorials and assignments Syndicate work. Peer feedback	MBA Full time OR Modular OR Blended learning Focus on Personal leadership Development journey	Leadership development module LEAD WITH RESPONSIBILITY underpins the MBA Includes focus on Personal leadership, Relationship Leadership and Organisational or Strategic Leadership PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Theory and practice through Narrative learning Experiential learning Action learning (work-based) Reflective learning Lectures, reading, interactive media, case studies and class discussion

University	Business School	Executive Education	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 8	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices	Academic NQF 9	Leadership focus and pedagogic practices
South Africa (UNISA)	SBL	Executive Development Programme	8 modules of which one is Strategic leadership and organisational change PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES One syndicate and one individual assignment Portfolio of evidence	PG Dip in Business Admin.	8 modules including Leadership and Organisational Behaviour – PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and competencies. Analyse and solve problems related to current leadership challenges in the workplace. Integrated management practice - synthesis and integration of cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills	MBL (Master of Business Leadership)	Theoretical and applied content To enhance leadership Develop transformative personal, group, and strategic leadership capabilities Dynamic leadership Module on Leading people Module on Leading strategic change Module Leadership Development PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES Contact and online learning Group participation Study schools Assessment : Strategic Leadership Project

2.3 Reflections on Nexus pedagogy

Teaching about leadership that is both personalised, contextualised and inclusive requires pedagogic practices that foreground the developing leader's own story, draws on her or his situated-ness, and provides the means for engagement in the messiness of leadership in context. Such pedagogies include exploratory, narrative and reflective pedagogies. As has been shown in Chapter 1, the pedagogic practices of the Nexus programme include narrative pedagogies of storytelling and the practice of dialogue, exploratory pedagogies of experiential learning journeys and working groups, and reflective pedagogies in assignment exercises, weekly email prompts, as well as the invitation to keep a journal. The Nexus programme does not make use of leadership theories to understand leadership, nor is there a reliance on lectures or readings.

The curriculum of the Nexus programme is driven by the participants' personal stories, and each person's "ideas shape the experience" (Nexus, 2017, p. 5). There is a strong focus on meaning being socially constructed through collective reflection and a shared sense of being both responsible for own and others' learning. Nexus participation will be shown to align very closely with learning leadership in its democratic, collective, open, developmental stance that requires critical reflection, and diverse inputs into analysing experience. This is revealed in Chapter 5 where there is a fuller explanation of the pedagogic practices in Nexus.

2.4 Conclusion

The participants in this research reported on what they had learned about leadership and, in order for me to engage with this section of the data, the literature on leadership was reviewed. Nexus has a particularly innovative pedagogy and, in order to highlight this contrasting leadership programme, pedagogies were reviewed. The chapter concludes with the philosophy that informs pedagogic practices of Nexus. In the next chapter, on the theoretical framework of this thesis, I deal with adult learning theories, African conceptions of adult learning and transformative learning theory.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework: Transformative learning theory

There is no generally accepted single definition, model, set of principles or conceptual framework to explain how adults learn (Illeris, 2018; Merriam, 2017). This thesis explores the learning processes in an adult leadership programme, predominantly using the lens of transformative learning theory which is introduced via the lens of experiential learning. Transformative learning theory, described as a 'foundational' theory of adult learning (Merriam, 2017, p. 19), and its development over time is the main focus of this chapter. One of the persistent critiques of transformative learning theory is its lack of attention to context (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989; Cunningham, 1992; Newman, 2012a), and the chapter concludes with a discussion of one of the more recent "approaches that attend to the social and political context of adult learning" (Merriam, 2017, p. 21).

The Nexus programme places emphasis on dialogic and experiential learning. In the introductory section of this chapter I describe experiential learning to situate transformative learning theory within this broader adult learning theory. Later, in section 3.4, I discuss in some detail the role of dialogue within Mezirow's (2000b, 2012) transformative learning theory.

We learn from experience in a variety of ways, which can include a direct embodied experience that engages the learner in the moment mentally, physically or emotionally, the reliving of a past experience, collaboratively with others, simulations, or through an introspective experience (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Literature on experiential learning frequently references Kolb's (1984) four stage process of experiential learning. The stages are identified as Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation. In this model, the grasping of experience is dialectically related through two modes of Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualisation, and of transforming experience through two dialectically related modes of Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194).

Kolb's model has been critiqued for presenting a simplification of "the complex social process of human learning" (Jarvis, 2009, pp. 22-23), deriving from an eclectic procedure and method (Miettinen, 2000, p. 56), a muddled typology of what concrete and abstract learning means (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010, p. 32), and (citing Fenwick (2003), in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 164) "that the learner's context is not taken into consideration … [and also that] Kolb does not account for issues of power in his model." In response to how Jarvis (2009, p. 25) saw shortcomings in various psychological models of learning, he has developed a model (see Figure 4) which caters for "the whole person who learns and [the fact] that the person learns in a social situation."

In order to engage with how Jarvis understands experiential learning he offers the following definitions first of experience, and then of experiential learning:

> Experience is the totality of ways in which human beings either make, or try to make, sense of what they consciously perceive. Once we have defined experience, we are in a position where we can offer a definition of experiential learning. Experiential learning is the process by which individuals, as whole persons, are consciously aware of a situation and make sense, or try to make sense of what they perceive, and then seek to reproduce or transform it and integrate the outcomes into their own biography (Jarvis, 2004, p. 104).

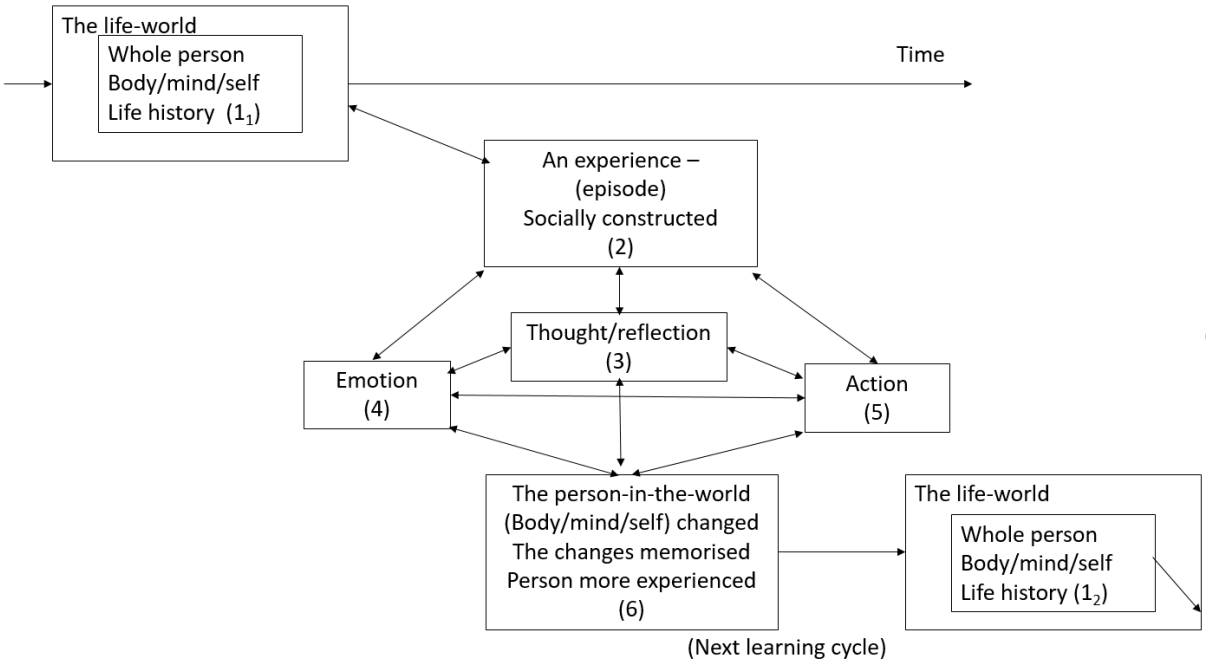


Figure 4. The transformation of a person through learning (Jarvis, 2009, p. 29)

Jarvis is clear that it is the whole person with their particular biography and within a particular social context (Box 1_1) who, when encountering a disjuncture (an experience or episode – Box 2), begins a process of thinking (reflection - Box 3), feeling (emotion - Box 4) or doing (action - Box 5) or any combination of these processes. These processes result in a changed person-in-the-world (Box 6), and the next learning cycle begins again at Box 1_2.

An experiential educator will adopt particular pedagogic practices such as encourage learners to think about some aspect of their life history in new ways, actively engage learners in any learning event, recognise the roles of affect and action in addition to that of cognition, and focus on both the process and content of a particular learning event. Often such an educator will describe experiential learning as what it is not: experiential learning does not include lectures or one-way transmission of knowledge (N. Miller, 2000, p. 74).

Cranton (2006b, p. 8) notes that

> transformative learning has to do with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience. Our habitual expectations … are the product of experiences, and it is those expectations that are called into question during the transformative learning process.

However, while transformative learning may include an experiential learning process, experiential learning is not always transformative. I now turn to a discussion on transformative learning theory.

In reading through the programme notes for the Nexus programme, as well as programme evaluation summaries, the language of transformative learning theory becomes obvious. For example, the 2017 Guidebook for Nexus states that the programme objectives are to develop greater self-awareness, interrogate mental models and assumptions, work constructively with diverse perspectives, critically reflect on country issues and, finally, develop a belief in one's own ability to become an agent of change (2017). Prior to commencing this research I was involved in the programme management of the Nexus programme, and became deeply interested in the type of learning reported by participants. The language and words used were not typical of reflections used in the business school's other leadership and management courses. For example, excerpts of comments made anonymously by different participants after an experiential learning day on Nexus include "He really challenges my mind and assumptions", "This was an incredible day. So many powerful experiences that will continue to challenge me and (hopefully) move me to action" and "… it's shaken my previously held beliefs. It's engaged me physically and emotionally" (Nexus ELD 2, 2013). These few selected comments and the summary of the programme objectives use terms found in the literature on transformative learning theory such as 'self-awareness', 'other perspectives', 'critical reflection', 'call to action', 'challenging of assumptions', 'previously held beliefs' and 'physical and emotional engagement'. The Nexus programme, in its intention and participants' reported experiences and reflections, is permeated by the language and concepts found in transformative learning theory.

Transformative learning theory is a theory that has dominated adult education for many decades (Brock, 2010; Cox & John, 2016; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Gunnlaugson, 2006; Hoggan, 2016a, 2016b; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Indeed, Newman salutes Mezirow for introducing a theory that could offer "a new understanding of adult learning" (Newman, 2012b, p. 409) and for instilling "an intellectual rigour into adult education discourse" (Newman, 2015, p. 37), and Hoggan (2016a, p. 58) proudly claims that this is a "good, sound, and useful theory, … [that] comes from one of us!" Clark and Wilson (1991, p. 75) contend that the complexity and expansiveness of this theory can deal with "multiple levels of learning within an integrated system of learning." Transformative learning theory, also called transformation or transformational learning in the literature (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 132) has been marked by acceptance, engagement in theory building, critique and robust development over many decades.

Given Mezirow's epistemological position of constructivism, Mezirow himself continued to invite and respond to critique (Hoggan, 2016a; Mezirow, 1989). Such critiques include Newman's (2012a) 'mutinous thoughts' in which he declared that transformative learning theory is nothing more than good learning, and Tennant (1993, p. 36) questioning what it is about Mezirow's theory that stimulates such divergent interpretations: to which Mezirow (1994) responded by saying that he either had not been clear in his explanations or that the field of adult education was not yet ready for a comprehensive theory. Dirkx (2012b, p. 400) concurs with Tennant's view when he writes that "lack of theoretical discipline has almost certainly undermined the credibility of the concept itself and further blurred its meaning." Additionally, transformative learning theory's "ubiquitous presence beyond the field of adult education has led to a construct that has come to mean many things to many educators" (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 17) and scholars outside of education.

Kegan's view is that transformative learning theory has become a victim of its own success, where "the language can become so appealing it begins to be used for myriad purposes; its meaning can be distorted, its distinct ideas lost. … Transformation begins to refer to any kind of change or process at all" (Kegan, 2000, p. 47). For Brookfield (2000, p. 141) the reification of the term transformative has either led to an uncritical acceptance of the virtue of transformation, or to it becoming "imbued with mystical significance."

Newman (2012a) argues that the corruption in meaning of the word 'transformative' is because it was an inappropriate label for change that comes about as a consequence of any learning activity. He calls into question whether transformative learning is a different kind of learning as proposed by Cranton (2006b) and Mezirow (1978; 1991a), or a matter of degree. He further disputes the sense that transformation is complete once the ten phases or elements of

meaning-making have been experienced, and dismisses the notion of spirituality in such learning, a critique I deal with later in the chapter. A further critique is the alignment of perspective transformation and conscientisation, insofar as Newman claims that the former has to do with a more changeable and malleable identity, and the latter with the conscious, a fluid and insubstantial experience of one's existence. Newman does not agree with one of the conditions of ideal discourse that one has to drive for consensus and cites an instance of having to find solidarity with a racist or homophobe. He also accuses transformative learning theorists of conceptual slippage in, for instance, Cranton (2000) and Mezirow's (1981) descriptions of meaning perspectives, and Mezirow's (1998a) forms of critical reflections.

Another area of debate and critique, and one that is most relevant to this study, is the need for Afrocentric perspectives as raised by Ntseane (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Ntseane, 2012). Ntseane, whose own lived experience as an African woman means that she knows first-hand that her "own African learning traditions have been marginalized and pushed further to the periphery of science and knowledge creation" (Ntseane, 2012, p. 274), calls for the inclusion of perspectives from those formerly colonised and who continue to be marginalised in order to create more useful knowledge. I deal with this critique more fully later in the chapter.

Dirkx (1998, p. 1), in making the case for a more holistic understanding of forms of transformation, proffers transformative learning as "a conceptual framework for understanding how adults learn" and Howie and Bagnall (2013) argue that the theory should be viewed as a conceptual metaphor instead of a theory. They write that "the face validity of the theory [transformative learning theory], in reality a conceptual metaphor, tends to overcome concerns about its underlying inadequacy" (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 832). They go further to say that this face validity reduces the concerns of practitioners and academics to conduct research into the fundamentals of transformative learning.

As a result of the diversity of theoretical perspectives there have been calls for a more integrative (Dirkx et al., 2006; Taylor, 1998) or holistic theory (Cranton & Roy, 2003; Dix, 2016), or for an integral theory of transformative learning (Gunnlaugson, 2005, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2002). Transformative learning theory has now been proposed as a metatheory by Hoggan (2016a), expanded further below, separate from what Hoggan proposes should be known as Mezirow's theory of *Perspective Transformation* [italics mine].

When asked to explain to others who do not know what transformative learning theory is, using the following lay explanation leads to nodding of heads and often into a discussion where examples of such learning have been experienced by the other person. My explanation goes along the lines of "In order to function efficiently and effectively in the world we need to make meaning in the moment of what we're experiencing. This meaning-making is often influenced

by our own personality, and by how we were brought up and socialised, oftentimes informed by our families, friends and schooling. And then something may happen which causes us to stop and think about how to interpret an experience anew, something that our meaning-making devices cannot cope with or explain. Such events could be precipitated by a chance comment, or a big life event such as death, divorce or moving to a new place, or a new thinking that seems to have emerged over time. And then the rules that have proved to be so useful in the past no longer apply. Sometimes this realisation is painful, sometimes it causes us distress or sometimes it may be that there is a slow understanding that we have got it wrong. Usually we begin to deal with this conflict through thinking hard about the incident, and why our 'truth' no longer holds. We may ask and discuss the matter with those we trust to help us see why this meaning-making has gone awry."

The description resonates with many and the identification by others with this explanation of how we learn makes it intuitively appealing as a theory of adult learning, the face validity that Howie and Bagnall (2013) earlier referred to. This crude description resonates with many who have had to deal with their unsurfaced and unexamined assumptions and who have had to question what they hold as personal truths.

Having set out a broad sense of transformative learning theory, and some of the developments and debates of this theory, I now focus on concepts and elements of the theory. This framework draws on many of Mezirow's (1971, 1978, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012) writings from 1971 through to 2012 and I concur with Baumgartner (2012) who writes that there is enormous value to be gained in exploring the evolution of a theory, and Cranton and Taylor (2012) who recommend returning to the original literature and reviewing with fresh eyes. Baumgartner's (2012) chapter in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* provides a useful framework to analyse the developments and critiques of transformative learning theory since the theory was first mooted in 1978. She has divided the theory's development according to decades with the beginnings of the theory in the 1970s, expansion and refinement in the 1980s, meaning perspectives, reflection and phase revision in the 1990s, and a theory-in-progress in the 2000s. More recently Gunnlaugson (2005, 2006) refers to the period in which Mezirow's theory was built on and critiqued as first wave theories; and the decades of bringing together competing views, which has resulted in broader theoretical perspectives, as second wave. Hoggan (2016a) has responded to Gunnlaugson's (2006) call to develop transformative learning theory as a metatheory which focuses on the outcomes of transformative learning.

These frameworks have been summarised in Figure 5. An early and persistent criticism of transformative learning theory was that Mezirow paid little attention to the influence of context

in how people transform their meaning structures. The absence of the foregrounding of context in this theory's development also creates difficulties in understanding the why and how of its development. In the model depicted in Figure 5 I show the contextual impact on the theory's development, and indicate the effect that different dominant paradigms (modernism, postmodernism and critical theory) have in influencing the critiques of transformative learning theory. In addition, the impact of different philosophical underpinnings of adult education theory are shown. The model is based on Gunnlaugson's (2006, 2008) first and second wave model of theories in transformative learning theory, and Baumgartner's (2012) chronological explanation of the theory's development. A third wave (or deeper level of second wave theory) is also shown in this model.

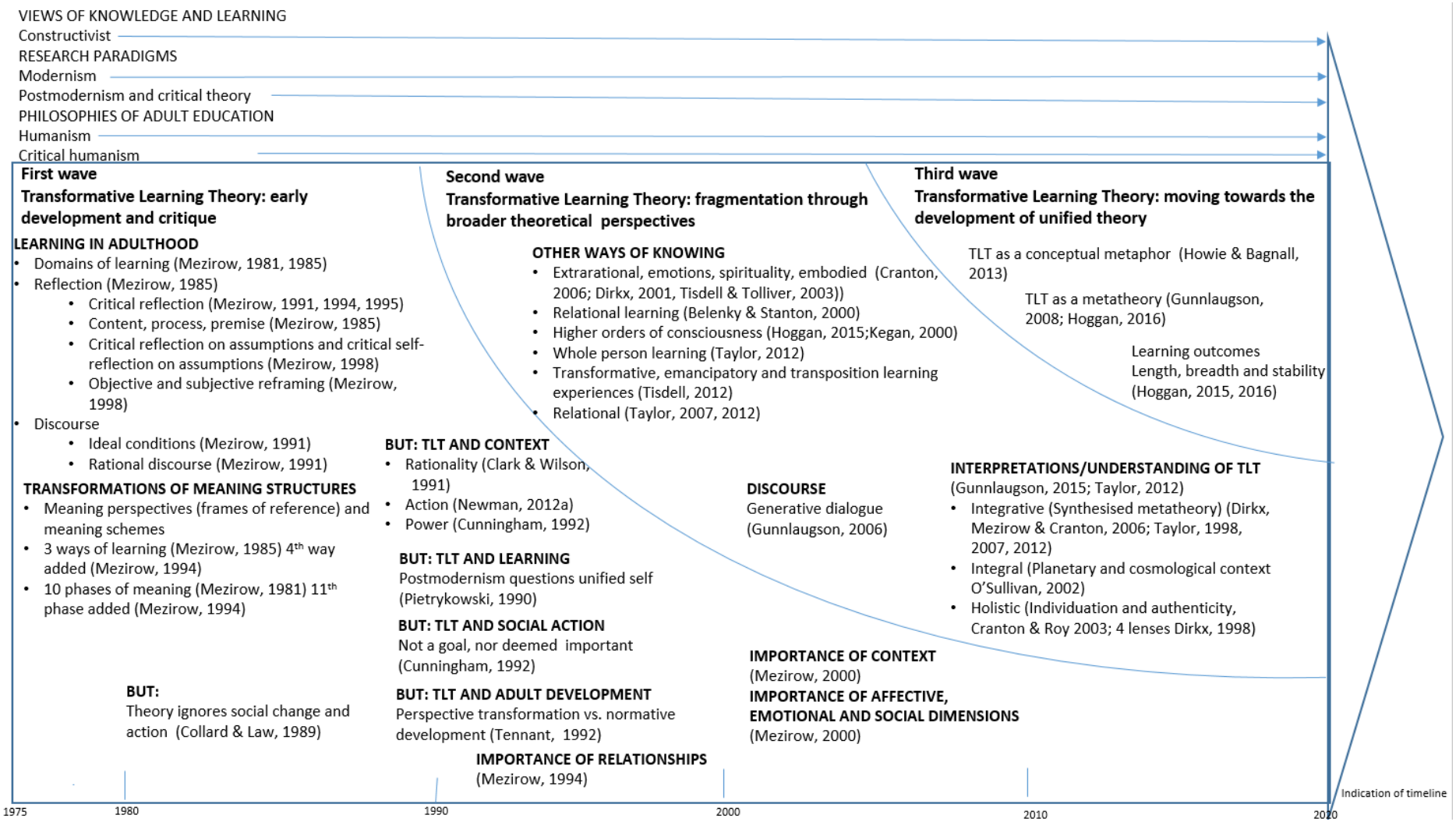


Figure 5. Transformative learning theory - a theory in progress

Note: Decades are marked on the lowest horizontal line as an indication only

3.1 Glimmerings of a new adult learning theory

As long ago as 1971 the American adult educator and scholar Jack Mezirow was calling for a practically useful theory to be used in adult education endeavours because at the time he felt there was no adequate theory (Mezirow, 1971, p. 135). In this article, which predates his proposed new cardinal theory for adult education, he declared that all meaning was constructed, and that in order to find such a robust theory it could only be developed through a grounded theory approach. "Adult education theory must involve just such an integrated body of concepts inductively derived from comparative qualitative analysis of similar types of organized group effort. … Such substantive theory would intensively examine comparable adult education enterprises over time" (Mezirow, 1971, p. 143). Mezirow's transformative learning theory has now become one of the most researched theories on learning in adulthood (Taylor, 2000).

3.2 Development of transformative learning theory

3.2.1 First wave: Early development and critique

Mezirow introduced what was to develop over nearly four decades into transformative learning theory in his 1978 article "Perspective Transformation" (Mezirow, 1978). Early theoretical influences on transformative learning theory include Freire's (2012) conscientisation, Kuhn's paradigms (Mezirow, 1990) and Habermas' learning domains (Mezirow, 1981, 1990). Kitchenham (2008) provides a useful summary of these key influences in Mezirow's theory. Key concepts from these theorists appear in Kitchenham's summary of transformative learning theory in the form of 'disorienting dilemma', 'meaning schemes', 'meaning perspectives', 'perspective transformation', 'frames of reference', 'habits of mind', 'reflective discourse' and 'critical self-reflection' (Kitchenham, 2008).

Mezirow in 1975 conducted a comprehensive national study on United States (US) women who had returned to community colleges. Using qualitative research and grounded theory methodology as proposed in his 1971 article, the empirical base for this study comprised 12 diverse community college programmes and later a further 24 programmes and lastly a survey of 314 two-year colleges. Data was also collected from 83 women who had attended the colleges. After this field data had been analysed, a second phase of interviews of 20 women who had attended consciousness raising groups and 50 alumni was conducted. Mezirow and his team of researchers found that the study participants had experienced 'personal transformation', which Mezirow called perspective transformation, and which was found to include the following 10 elements.

> (1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) self examination; (3) a critical assessment of personally internalized role assumptions and a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations; (4) relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues recognizing that one's problem is shared and not exclusively a private matter; (5) exploring options for new ways of acting; (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; (7) planning a course of action: (8) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; (9) provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback; and (10) a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective. (Mezirow, 1981, p. 65)

These "phases of meaning becoming clarified" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 186) remained largely intact over time with regard to the theory, but with the following changes noted: "(2) self examination" became "self examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame"; "(5) exploring options for new ways of acting" was redefined as "exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions"; and "(6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles" became "building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 86). In his 1994 article "Understanding Transformation (sic) Theory", Mezirow added an eleventh phase "Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224) but this phase is left out of his later versions of the phases (Mezirow, 2009, 2012). Not all steps need be present for transformative learning to happen (Closs & Antonello, 2011, p. 71).

The 1978 article outlines a kind of learning that Mezirow stated is fundamental in adult development. This article proved to be the beginning of what is now a large body of work that comprises transformative learning theory, a theory that is still in progress (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Mezirow, 2000a). Illeris (2009), in his introduction to Mezirow's chapter in the book *Contemporary theories of learning. Learning theorists ... in their own words,* writes that it was "only in connection with women's adult education in the US that he [Mezirow] discovered a wide-ranging kind of learning, reaching right into changes of the identity." Mezirow argues that one gets a new sense of identity when realising that some life problems cannot be resolved through learning more about the issues, but require understanding and thinking about the very meaning of the situation in a different way. This is what he called a 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1978).

For Mezirow, learning in adulthood happens when prior interpretations of an event or experience are used to renew or revise the interpretation of the meaning of a current experience or event to guide future action (Mezirow, 1995b, 1998a). These types of reflective learning could be viewed as informative or reformative learning. In contrast, transformative

learning, a critically reflective type of learning, happens when there is a change in an individual's frames of reference. This conscious change happens through critical reflection about assumptions built non-critically which are held at an unconscious level and "whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 6). The resulting frame of reference is deemed more inclusive, discriminating and emotionally capable of change, which means the individual is "more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2003).

In Mezirow's words, transformative learning is

> the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Mezirow, 2000b, pp. 7-8)

This quote contains key concepts of meaning structures (frames of reference, meaning perspectives, habits of mind), processes (reflection, discourse, action) and underpinning philosophy (social construction of knowledge through others' experiences and constructive discourse) that Mezirow used in developing this learning theory.

Drawing on Baumgartner's (2012) organising framework that tracks the development of transformative learning theory over time, these key concepts will now be explained in greater detail. These concepts were developed and critiqued in what Gunnlaugson (2006, 2008) has termed the first wave of transformative learning theory. For Gunnlaugson, first wave perspectives deal with how transformative learning is experienced, and a focus on what the specific dimensions are within transformative learning, whereas second wave theorists look to how different perspectives are explained.

Transforming meaning structures

In the 1980s Mezirow refined his definitions and expanded on some key concepts such as meaning perspectives and meaning schemes. Given that Mezirow saw the purpose of learning as developing an ability to make meaning of experiences (Mezirow, 1985, p. 17), the theory is replete with many concepts, terms, synonyms and definitions that describe nuances within meaning-making. The next quote shows how Mezirow used synonyms to describe the same concept, and nuances in meaning-making: "*Meaning perspective* refers to the structure of

cultural and psychological assumptions within which our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience. It is a frame of reference made up from a system of meaning schemes" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21) (italics in original). For Mezirow 'frame of reference' and 'meaning perspective' are interchangeable terms, and he defined two levels of meaning structure where the higher order structure, meaning perspective, comprised a set of lower order structures, meaning schemes. Meaning schemes are defined as expectations that govern cause-effect relationships, roles, social action, sense of self, values, and connecting feelings and action, whilst a meaning perspective, the sum of one's meaning schemes, is a "personal paradigm involving cognitive, conative and affective dimensions [that] positions us for action" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 22). Here Mezirow clearly links the perceiving, thinking and feeling processes to an outcome of action.

Perspective transformation, a "central function for adult education" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 65) is understood "as a quest for meaning by which to better understand ourselves and to anticipate events." Mezirow claims that perspective transformation is akin to Freire's conscientisation and Habermas' emancipatory action (Mezirow, 1981, p. 65). Mezirow defines perspective transformation as

> the process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of our psychocultural assumptions has come to constrain the way in which we perceive our world, of reconstituting that structure in a way that allows us to be more inclusive and discriminating in our integration of experience and to act on these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1985, p. 22)

Learning processes in adulthood

Mezirow (1981, 1985) drew on the work of German philosopher Habermas to describe the learning process. Habermas defined learning according to three generic domains, each with its own resulting action: technical (instrumental action), practical (communicative action) and emancipatory (emancipatory action). This provided Mezirow with a framework for suggested educational approaches for instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective learning. Instrumental learning deals with the world of facts and where meaning is inferred deductively, and dialogic learning deals with the world of morals, ideals, values, philosophy where meaning is derived through symbolic interactions. Dialogic learning was to become a cornerstone concept of transformative learning theory. I will return to dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Rule, 2015) and generative dialogue (Gunnlaugson, 2006) at the end of this chapter.

Mezirow also drew on the work of Habermas in defining ideal conditions for discourse, the means for dialogic learning. "Ideally, participants in a discourse have full information about

the matter at issue, they are able to reason argumentatively, they can reflect critically about assumptions and premises, and they have sufficient self-knowledge to assure that participation in discourse is free from self-deception" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 19). These conditions provide a perfect learning situation.

A further crucial element for changing meaning structures is the process of discourse. For Mezirow (1991b, p. 150), rational argumentation is dialogic reasoning. He elucidates that argumentation is a "process of dialogue in which implicit validity claims are made explicit and contested, with an effort to criticize and vindicate them through arguments" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 68). Where meaning becomes contested there is a need to validate, consensually if possible, "the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness (in relation to norms), or authenticity (in relation to feelings) of what is being asserted" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 77). That validity claims or meaning are contested in dialogue stands in contrast to what Bohm (1996), Isaacs (1999), and Rule (2015) define as a more exploratory, tentative and collaborative understanding of dialogue.

Mezirow describes optimal conditions for rational discourse which included epistemic factors such as access to accurate and complete information, attitudinal factors such as an ability to weigh evidence and be objective about arguments, being open to alternative perspectives and a willingness to be critically reflective on assumptions and to accept objective "rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity", and situational factors of being free from coercion and having equal opportunity to participate in discourse (Mezirow, 1991b, pp. 77-78). Clark and Wilson (1991) disagree with Mezirow's acontextual, ahistorical and transcendental definition of ideal discourse as a means to rationality.

For Mezirow, self-reflective learning is appraisive [his word (1985, p.21)] where the learner's focus is on questioning deeply held assumptions and their validity and usefulness in making meaning of experiences. Mezirow states that critical self-reflectivity, "the bringing of one's assumptions, premises, criteria, and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them – is indispensable in self-reflective learning" (Mezirow, 1985, pp. 25 -26). Later, Newman (1994) was to commend Mezirow for recontextualising the act of reflection through his linking of reflection on how we interact with our culture, and the impact that that interaction has on the way we think, feel and act.

Transformative learning theory and social action

Collard and Law claimed that Mezirow ignored the "difficulty of fostering conditions of ideal learning in a social environment in which structural inequalities are entrenched" (Collard & Law, 1989, p. 105). In fact they went on to question whether Mezirow's "selective interpretation

and adaptation of Habermas, and partially dependent on problems within Habermas' own work" (Collard & Law, 1989, p. 102) meant that Mezirow was able to claim a theory of social change. This critique has proved to be most durable, and is still being debated amongst adult education scholars (Hoggan, 2016b). Mezirow's (1989, p. 172) response was to say that whilst social action is crucial, it is not the only goal of adult education, and that when learners identify with those who they realise have been oppressed it becomes possible that collective social action might result. But Mezirow maintained that this was not a necessary focus for adult educators, but rather a worthy by-product of what might be learnt.

Collard and Law (1989) were writing from a critical theory perspective, whilst Mezirow was theorising from his "pre-eminent position in the humanist camp" (Newman, 2015, p. 36). Newman (2015) states that all theory and practice in adult education is either socialist or humanist, but not necessarily mutually exclusive. Whilst the humanist's focus is on individual development and belief that all people are capable of personal growth, the socialist view is that education should cause a collective struggle for social justice. The former looks to Mezirow for its lead, the latter to Paulo Freire (Newman, 2015).

In her reflections about Mezirow's early developments of the theory, Rose (2015), a member of Mezirow's community colleges research team in 1975, explains that Mezirow's work developed

> from a social change paradigm. His starting point was 'How do we effect social change' and what kind of individual change is demanded for social change to occur. Mezirow came to the individual through his interest in the social and not the other way around. (Rose, 2015, p. 43)

Rose foregrounds the humanist against the background of the socialist approach to education. Mezirow (1991b, p. xvi) self-identifies as a social action educator and, citing Freire, maintains that "critical consciousness [is a] prerequisite for liberating personal development and social action" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 103).

For Mezirow social action is the result of making learners aware of

> alternative perspectives for understanding how social practices and institutions can be modified so as to create a society in which adults can be enfranchised to participate fully … it is precisely this enfranchisement that provides the common denominator uniting continuing educators with such apparently diverse goals as intellectual development, cognitive

> development, self-actualization, democratic participation, emancipation, and social action. (Mezirow, 1989, p. 29)

Mezirow's view of an autonomous and self-directed learner meant that the potential for collective social action was always a possible outcome of a perspective transformation.

This critique and others will be discussed later in this section.

3.2.2 Building on, critiquing transformative learning theory

In the next decade, the 1990s, Mezirow further developed his definition of meaning perspectives and their distortions, and he showed the importance of relationships in this type of learning. Types of reflection in transformative learning were also advanced. This decade was also marked by many critiques of the theory which resulted in a plethora of alternative perspectives on exactly what constitutes transformative learning.

More about meaning structures

For Mezirow (1991b, p. 42) meaning perspective refers to

> the structure of assumptions within which one's past experience *assimilates and transforms new experience*. A meaning perspective is a habitual set of expectations that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and that serves as a (usually tacit) belief system for interpreting and evaluating the meaning of experience (italics in original).

Meaning perspectives are shaped, limited and distorted in three ways: by how we use knowledge or the ways in which we know, for example learning styles (these are validity criteria) which Mezirow called epistemic perspectives; or criteria of social norms and language, sociolinguistic perspectives; or psychological perspectives, criteria that are used to develop a sense of self, for example, personality traits (Closs & Antonello, 2011; Mezirow, 1991b).

Given that we all hold meaning perspectives through which we interpret and evaluate the meaning of our experiences, how would possible limitations and distortions be brought to light? Mezirow maintains that this happens through critical reflection, and he continued to refine and develop the definition of reflection.

Learning in adulthood through critical reflection

Reflection is the "process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 104), and Mezirow

contends it is the central dynamic in the transformation of meaning structures. Reflecting on the assumptions of content (what is known) or process of problem solving may result in changed meaning schemes, but premise reflection, or critical reflection on problematic taken-for-granted assumptions (how and why what is known) lead to perspective transformation. This was positioned as problem-posing in contrast to the problem-solving required in reflecting on content or process. Content or process reflection was termed critical reflection on assumptions, and premise reflection he called critical reflection on self-assumptions. It is the latter that leads to perspective transformation.

Mezirow (1981) also argues that a hierarchy of reflective practices exist, which causes increasing discernment. He suggests that there is a move from consciousness, which includes reflectivity, to affective reflectivity, then discernment reflectivity and judgmental reflectivity, followed by critical consciousness (where individuals become aware of their awareness) and finally to conceptual, psychic and theoretical reflectivity. With reference to Habermas' domains of learning, Mezirow argues that reflection in instrumental and communicative (practical) learning is an action of critiquing and correcting distorted assumptions. For emancipatory learning, reflection is the action of challenging the very definition of the problem, and here critical reflection critiques the reason for the presuppositions. Later Mezirow (1998a) was to term this action critical self-reflection on assumptions.

According to Mezirow (1981) adulthood is the time when critical reflection through reassessments of assumptions becomes possible, and there is a realisation that epistemic, sociocultural or psychic distortions exist in our views of reality. The absence of critical reflection leads to diminished and constrained learning, professional practice and opportunities in life (Kreber, 2012). Van Woerkom (2010), however, raises the argument that too few studies exist "researching to what extent people are capable of critical reflection, or on researching to what extent critical reflection actually leads to the fulfilment of particular ideals" or, indeed, to the operationalising of the constructs of critical reflection (p. 345).

Van Woerkom (2010, p. 340) draws on definitions and ideals of critical reflection from four intellectual traditions, namely ideology critique, psychotherapy, analytic philosophy and logic, and pragmatist constructivism, to argue that "they all express normative ideals for better, deeper, or more liberating ways of learning … [and] most of these definitions share a common rationalistic bias." This partiality towards a strongly rationalistic view of critical reflection stands in contrast to what Taylor's (1997) review of the empirical studies on transformative learning demonstrates on the role of emotions and feelings experienced in learning. Emotions can act either as catalysts for reflection, or may cause the person to ignore, through ambivalence, or inhibit their reflection. Where anxiety provoked by an unfamiliar task is embraced

> it is possible to move in either direction, toward learning or away from it … Only when one is able to hold the uncertainty created by the anxiety long enough for risks to be taken is one capable of critical reflection. This means that critical reflection should be conceptualized as an experience linking reason and feeling (Taylor, 2001) instead of an experience of controlling emotions. (Van Woerkom, 2010, p. 348)

Indeed Newman's (1994, p. 239) description of reflection declares it to be "an emancipatory activity of the intellect that can encompass reverie, flights of fancy, insight, and intuition as well as thinking and reasoning", and he disagrees with critical reflection being taught as a competency i.e. a measurable skill. He praises Mezirow for defining critical reflection as a contextualised activity in which assumptions are validated within a cultural context and from the viewpoint of the person as a cultural being.

Postmodernism and transformative learning theory

This decade saw the rise of critical and postmodern philosophies in adult education, away from humanistic adult education (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 106), amongst other philosophies such as behaviourist and liberal education (Price, 2000). Critical theory, as applied to the practice of adult education, asks questions about the taken-for-granted assumptions made about the world in which we live, including the structures and institutions that maintain exclusionary and non-emancipatory practices (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 241) or which result in privilege and oppression in the educational context (Baumgartner, 2012). In critical response to modernists' "humanistic and Enlightenment search for the universal foundations of truth, morality and aesthetics" (Bagnall, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 259), postmodernists hold a more contested, impressionistic, negotiated, fluid, and diverse view of reality. A postmodernist view of truth is its relativism and the self "is not the unified, integrated, authentic self of modern times. Rather, the self is multiple, ever changing, and some say, fragmented" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 260). The critiques of transformative learning theory at this time reflected these new philosophical approaches to adult education.

Thus the critiques of this time centred on how Mezirow, whilst acknowledging that context is a factor in transformative learning, continued to downplay its significance especially with regard to historical and social context and in critical discourse (Clark & Wilson, 1991), and in taking action (Newman, 1994). Mezirow was also criticised for holding the modernist view of a learner as a unified self (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Pietrykowski, 1996), and for claiming that perspective transformation was sufficient condition for adult development (Tennant, 1993). Mezirow continued to hold the view that personal transformation was sufficient, and granted scant

consideration for the social dimensions of learning (Cunningham, 1992).

Clark and Wilson (1991) contend that making meaning of experiences is fundamentally context-dependent, and use the context of the historical time and place of development of transformative learning theory to illustrate their critique. Citing the dominant research philosophy of learning processes during the 1960s and 1970s, that of the psychological paradigm, meant that Mezirow described learning by what happened in the interior world of the learner. Clark and Wilson assert that Mezirow ignored the presence or impact of multiple contexts that may have given rise to the transformative learning process of the women participants in his study. In addition, the historical context of the United States at the time of Mezirow's study was marked by great social and political change including a resurgence of the women's movement. Forces within the social context of this study included patriarchy, which in turn impacted women and men differently through the two groups having unequal status. It is Clark and Wilson's contention that a gendered analysis would have brought attention to women's subordinate status, and that this may have impacted their learning. They write that "the women's experiences were studied as if they stood apart from their historical and sociocultural context, thereby limiting our understanding of the full meaning of those experiences" (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 78). For Cunningham (1992, p. 186) decontextualising meaning and social relationships by ignoring economic and cultural power relationships is to discount the fact that the "dependency producing epistemic or psychic presuppositions" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 137) are produced by that same context that created the dependency.

This critique about lack of social, political, economic and historical context has pertinence for this study. The historical context in which this case is explored is a newly democratic country formed out of a dysfunctional, dehumanising political and social system of legislated racism. Despite a new democratic dispensation, the meaning perspectives held are informed by an apartheid and colonial past.

A further critique is that the theory postulates the humanist view of the unified and rational self, rather than the postmodernist understanding of the fragmented and contested subjectivity in which the individual lives (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 79). In contrast, Tennant (1993) defends Mezirow's position on the assumption of a unified rational self. In fact, it is the social context within the individual that gives rise to dysfunctional meaning perspectives which results in the "distorted self which is prey to its own uncritically assimilated social and cultural norms, assumptions, premises, language codes, and so on" (Tennant, 1993, p. 36).

Placing focus of the learning process in a psychological conception of self means that "human agency is assumed to be at least potentially more powerful than any inhibiting [sociocultural] influences" (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 80). Clark and Wilson feel that the theory would be

bolstered by the “formative role of the multiple contexts within which both the individual and his or her experience is situated and by which it is interpreted (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 80).

The assumption of the universality of Western and White values of individualism, rationality, decisiveness and autonomy was also critiqued for its uncritical assimilation into the theory. Their final critique of Mezirow’s theory was his decontextualised view of rationality, given Mezirow’s position that rationality is a key concept in the learning process. Clark and Wilson propose that rationality “is a judgmental and provisional process of justifying action within the boundaries of a particular community of inquirers” (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 82). Whilst Mezirow did acknowledge the provisional and communal nature of rationality, and the ideal standards of real discourse were then portrayed as contingencies, he was “unwilling to forego his original thesis of rationality as the cogency of argument and evidence alone" (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 84). For Clark and Wilson, rationality is context-dependent, value-oriented and historically situated, and rather than Mezirow’s individualistic process, it is a communal process that accounts for “those tacit affective ties that bind individuals together in a community” (Bernstein, cited in Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 90).

Newman (1994) calls into question the decontextualisation of action in Mezirow’s theory, asking whether critical reflection by individuals is sufficient for the kind of social action that Freire’s conscientisation calls for. Cunningham (1992) too questions whether personal transformation is enough for social transformation, and points out that Mezirow himself did not include Freire’s (2012) praxis in his theory of transformative learning. For Newman it appears that Mezirow’s phases of transformative learning would mean that the individual’s actions result in, at most, a re-integration into society. But, as discussed earlier, he did commend Mezirow for his recontextualisation of reflection.

3.2.3 Second wave: fragmentation through broader theoretical perspectives

Mezirow (1991b, 2000b, 2012) continued to refine terms and definitions in his theory during the 1990s and into the 2000s, and at the same time a second wave (Gunnlaugson, 2005, 2006; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) of integral, holistic and more integrative interpretations of transformative learning theory emerged. Learning theorists Dirkx, Mezirow and Cranton (2006), Taylor (1998, 2007), and Taylor and Snyder (2012) presented a synthesised metatheory or an integrative understanding of transformative learning theory. An integral view of transformative learning was proposed by O'Sullivan (2002) when he introduced a planetary and cosmological context for learning. An holistic interpretation is offered by Cranton and Roy (2003) who used a framework of individuation and authenticity to weave together disparate views of transformative learning, and Dirkx (1998) proposed a model of four strands of

transformation of consciousness-raising, critical reflection, individuation or development.

Interpretations of transformative learning theory

In this section I begin with a more in-depth discussion of holistic models, followed by integral representations of the theory. Finally integrative interpretations of transformative learning theory are deliberated. Drawing on various online dictionary definitions as well as Gunnlaugson (2005, p. 332) the terms 'integral' and 'integrative' are now defined.

An integral approach to theory development seeks to determine an ideal and complete description of the phenomenon, in which no elements are missing and nothing essential is lacking, nor is there redundancy in concepts. It is an attempt to present the whole portrait that draws on both transdisciplinary and transcultural contexts. On the other hand, an integrative approach to theory building looks to the creation of a harmonious and interrelated whole that is created from separate elements drawn from many, varied and sometimes competing disciplines. The integrative approach aims for a reduction of fragmentation that is the consequence of traditional discipline-based scholarship. In bringing together elements from disparate disciplines it becomes possible to find patterns and relationships within and between disciplines.

Cranton and Roy (2003) propose a holistic perspective of transformative learning theory, not through a melding of the various dualities of rational or extrarational, cognitive or emotional, reflective or imaginative, or individual or social, but through showing these dimensions can co-exist in a holistic perspective. In the first three pairs of dichotomies the first mentioned states of rational, cognitive and reflective are what I term 'learning from the head': the product of thinking, or even thinking deeply. The second mentioned states of extrarational, imaginative and emotional are what I call 'learning from the heart': here intuition, emotions, feelings, relationships and embodied learning reign. The model they propose plaits together three strands of transformative learning, individuation and authenticity: each strand keeps its integrity but a new whole is created.

Drawing on Jung's depth psychology, individuation is "the *process* by which we become aware of who we are as different from others … [it is] a dialogue with our unconscious [in order to] come to better understand our shadow … [and to] realize the influence of archetypes on the self" (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 91) (italics in the original). The process of individuation means that we come to know who the self is in relation to the world, and become "more fully the person you were meant to be" (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 92). Cranton and Roy's definition of authenticity, when not couched in terms of what it means to be an authentic educator, is that it is an "expression of the genuine self in the community" (Cranton & Roy, 2003, p. 94), and

that ‘genuine self’ chooses to “critically participate in life rather than run with the unconscious herd.” These authors show the interrelationships between transformative learning and individuation, transformative learning and authenticity and, finally, individuation and authenticity. Their conclusion is that the many facets of the human psyche, and the multiple contexts in which lives are lived means that in any description of the ways in which transformation happens or perspectives are opened up, there needs to be a honouring of the complexities in human lives and various social settings.

For Dirkx (1998, p. 11) the conscious presence of transformative learning “within our lives is best understood as a gift, and act of grace … a potential that is eternally present.” Dirkx (1998) holds that the underlying assumptions about the purpose of adult education is what guides the practice of education. If the case for teaching adults is so that they can learn in order to earn (Cunningham, 1992), knowledge is treated as an external commodity that the learner needs to absorb through the learning process. Dirkx sees the transformative educator as placing “the emphasis on actualization of the person and society through liberation and freedom” (Dirkx, 1998, p. 8). For Dirkx, a holistic perspective of transformative learning which includes the roles of relationships, feelings, intuition and somatic knowing, and transformation can happen through consciousness-raising, or through critical reflection, as development and, in agreement with Cranton and Roy’s (2003) views, through individuation.

Integral transformative learning is a response to the challenges that arise within a planetary context. O'Sullivan (2008, p. 27) contends that humanity is “in the midst of a major historical transformation of both human and Earth history. It is a time fraught with cataclysmic dangers as well as creative opportunities.” As a consequence, adult learning needs to have a greater cosmological focus, and such learning means that “we need to reengage whole areas of creativity … to honor ourselves as whole persons in relation to a cosmos and biosphere” (O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 174).

This view of transformative learning also moves beyond a focus on rationality and narrow conceptions of development of the Self, to a “wider perspective that arises through vision-logic, a stage of development that represents a way of relating to the world that is more inclusive, more integrated, and more complex than our traditional and prevailing ‘rational’ view” (Karpiak, 2013, p. 83). The concept of vision-logic is described by Ken Wilber, a transpersonal psychologist, and is the fifth stage of the development of human consciousness. Wilber, as cited in Karpiak (2013), gives the stages of human development as the archaic, the magical, the mythic, the rational, the existential (vision-logic), followed by a further three stages of development. Aspects of rationality include objectivity and analysis, a concern for adaptation and rational decision making, and understanding that arises from the mode of logos. The

rational mode also promotes narrow individualism. In contrast, the vision-logic mode is more connected and personal, a concern for transformation, and more 'mindful' decision-making, and where mythos and logos are integrated. Under this mode, authenticity is promoted. For further discussion on the characteristics of the rational and vision-logic modes, see Karpiak (2013).

The vision-logic mode is supported by the African conception of life, which "is based on an integrative world view. All life to the African is total; all human activities are closely interrelated. This has as its underlying principle the sanctity of the person, her/his spirituality and essentiality" (Bangura, 2005, p. 19). The foundational concept of ubuntu, "a unifying vision or worldview enshrined in the maxim umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu: i.e. 'a person is a person through other persons'" (Bangura, 2005, p. 31), holds that identity and becoming can only happen **through** other persons. Merriam and Ntseane explored transformative learning through an Afrocentric perspective and found an "interdependent positionality" in which "the collective includes human beings, the world of nature, and the world of spirits" (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008, p. 196). The metaphysical world is very much present and influential. From an Afrocentric paradigm the interconnectedness of the spiritual and the physical means that the context of knowledge is complex (Ntseane, 2011, p. 313). In fact, "not only must the living and the dead share with and care for one another, but the living and the dead depend on one another" (Bangura, 2005, p. 32). Ntseane (2011) argues that incorporating Afrocentric and African Feminist paradigms into transformative learning theory creates an opportunity for the theory to become more culture sensitive.

In the vision-logic mode the perspective transformation that arises from critical reflection is from "distortions of the (primarily) rational stage in order to permit them to become more open to the ideas, values and attitudes of vision-logic" (Karpiak, 2013, p. 92). O'Sullivan (2002, p. 11) offers the following definition of transformative learning

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

Integral transformative learning is thus a response to the environmental, technological and social contexts of our current times, with associated myriad complex problems. Finding

solutions requires a coherent, integrated and encompassing worldview.

In 1998 Taylor's monograph on the theory and practice of transformative learning provided the first of several integrative overviews of three alternate perspectives to Mezirow's theory of how transformative learning happened. Over time Taylor (Taylor, 2005, 2007, 2008; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) was to add four new approaches to transformative learning. Table 2 summarises the various approaches as proposed by their key authors, the process of learning as well as the unit of analysis. This integrative approach to transformative learning, or, as Hoggan (2016a) describes it 'a synthetic metatheory', proposes a framework to categorise "transformative learning outcomes and the processes that lead to those outcomes" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 60).

Table 4 *Approaches to transformative learning*

Note: After (Hoggan, 2016a; Taylor, 1998, 2007; Taylor & Cranton, 2012)

Sources	**After Taylor (1998) and Hoggan (2016a)**			
Approach	**Psychocritical**	**Psychoanalytical**	**Psychodevelopmental**	**Social Emancipatory**
Key theorists	Mezirow	Boyd and Myers (cited in Taylor, 2008) Cranton Dirkx	Kegan Daloz (cited in Taylor, 2008)	Freire
Process	Critical reflection on assumptions and rational discourse that result in more robust meaning structures to interpret experiences and make meaning	Individuation – reflection on psychic structures over one's lifetime in order to develop deeper understanding of Self	Continuous, incremental and progressive growth over one's lifespan. Epistemological change. Personal context, relationships and holistic ways of knowing	Reflection and action (praxis) to transform social structures to become more equitable. Conscientisation addresses power of oppressors
Unit of analysis	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual and society
Changes	Individual	Individual	Individual	Self in relation to society

Source	After Taylor (2008)			
Approach	**Neurobiological**	**Cultural-Spiritual**	**Race-centric**	**Planetary**
Key theorists	Janik	Brooks Tisdell	Williams	O'Sullivan
Process	Brain structures change. Discomfort followed by discovery, depends on one's experiences, needs and interests, impacted by emotive, sensory and kinaesthetic factors, gendered	Interconnections between the individual and social. Creation of knowledge narratives	Nurturing of consciousness of connections between Self, community and universe. Focus on those (women) of African descent – Culturally bounded, oppositional and nonindividualistic	Shift from Western technical-industrial values to finding connections between universe, planet, natural environment, human community and personal world
Unit of analysis	Individual	Individual and society	Individual and society	Individual and society
Changes	Individual	Self in relation to society	Self in relation to society	Self in relation to society

Situating this research in the literature: Other ways of knowing

Mezirow continued to hold the view of a rational process of questioning and revising assumptions although he did begin to acknowledge that there were other ways of knowing (Dirkx et al., 2006). These other ways included what I referred to in the previous section as an holistic approach, that of extrarational, emotional, spiritual and embodied knowing (Cranton, 2006a; Dirkx, 2001; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2013; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), and also relational learning (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; English & Irving, 2012), higher orders of consciousness (Hoggan, 2016a; Kegan, 2000), whole person learning (Taylor, 2000), and transformative, emancipatory and transpositional learning (Tisdell, 2012).

Learning through relationships (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) is yet another way leading to transformative learning, and it is to this perspective of transformative learning theory that I now turn.

In Taylor's (2007, p. 187) critical review of the empirical research on transformative learning theory from 1999 – 2005, he finds "the role of relationships in transformative learning most significant. This questions the high degree of emphasis given to the autonomous and formal nature of transformative learning and reveals a learning process dependent on the need for support, trust, friendship and intimacy." He then posits the questions "What is a transformative relationship? … What is the nature of these relational aspects? How are they fostered appropriately and professionally?" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 187-188). Several exemplar studies

identified by Taylor and Snyder (2012, p. 44) provide some of the answers to these questions.

Of particular interest are the studies of Sandlin and Bey (2006) who found that personal relationships are not aligned to a greater social vision, Sands and Tennant's (2010) changing nature of relationships in transformative learning, the role played by significant others in intercultural learning (Jokikokko, 2009), supportive relationships in joint leadership (Wilhelmson, 2006), Cranton and Wright's (2008) learning companions who fostered transformative learning, and transformative learning moulded by relationships and community commitments within an Afrocentric context (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008).

In the instance of Sandlin and Bey's Sandlin and Bey (2006) study, research participants who were archaeologists working with a local community in Yucatan, Mexico, reported amongst other findings that the nature of their commitment to the local community had changed "in a way that goes beyond the traditional relationship of seasonal employer-employee and that avoids paternalism" (Sandlin & Bey, 2006, p. 266). The archaeologists had developed a sense of culpability for the impact of their work on the community, and consequently were looking for ways "to enact their responsibilities to interact with and include local communities" (Sandlin & Bey, 2006, p. 268). Whilst the interaction with the community did happen at a personal level, the archaeologists in this project felt that the ideal vision for this collaboration should have been at a larger scale.

But in a telling quote from one of the study participants ("the structures I'm creating are going to be involved in these people's lives, in some ways, and they're going to be involved in our ways, either as archaeological employees, or as other opportunities come, for a long period of time" (Sandlin & Bey, 2006, p. 268) the nature of the inclusive relationship can be questioned. There are signposts to disconnection. The use of the phrases "these people" and "our ways" indicates an unconscious demonstration of unequal power. Whilst the study participants had transformed some of their frames of reference, and had indeed formed friendships with those in the local community, and thus could claim that relationships had influenced their learning, the nature of this relational learning seems to be more extractive than collaborative.

In contrast, the participants in Cranton and Wright's (2008) study, adult literacy educators, are named as learning companions for those adults who are learning to read later in their lives. The nature of these relationships is marked by humility, respect and authenticity. Learning companions are described as people who "walk the learning path beside the student, making observations and asking for considerations; it's a shared exchange" (Cranton & Wright, 2008, p. 43). They are able to create an environment for learning through "creating a sense of safety, trust between educator and learner, developing a sense of possibility, helping learners overcome fear, discovery within the self, and acknowledging the whole person" (Cranton &

Wright, 2008, p. 37). This study begins to answer the questions raised by Taylor as to how transformative learning can be fostered appropriately and professionally, and what the nature of this kind of relational learning is.

Another study that points to the nature of relational learning is of those bereaved through suicide (Sands & Tennant, 2010). In group sessions the hallmarks of trust, support and friendship are noticeable, and through storytelling there are opportunities "for questions to be asked that can elicit new understandings that allow for changes [in meaning-making]" (Sands & Tennant, 2010, p. 116). The authors note that in the telling of a story there is a need for prior reflection in order to make the story comprehensible for an audience. In the concluding section of this chapter I return to the power of storytelling as a means of fostering transformative learning. Sands and Tennant (2010, p. 116) extend the question that asks what kinds of relationships promote transformative learning to "how are relationships changed, modified, reframed, or recast as a result of transformative learning?": the latter question forms a part of my research.

Finally, an observation is made by Wilhelmson (2006, p. 500) that supportive relationships take time to create, and take time for the parties to learn "to trust and have confidence in one another, to develop common values and let go of prestige-mindedness." The 'letting go' in this quote is of prestige-mindedness, but in a sense there has to be a letting go of some frame of reference that becomes part of a transformative learning experience. The matter of time taken to develop supportive relationships is a significant factor for those who have embarked on finding their model of leadership in a programme based on transformative learning.

Bangura (2005) explains how the understanding of ubuntu cannot be separated from that of relationship. He writes

> Ubuntu's respect for the particularity of the other is closely aligned to its respect for individuality. …. Individualism exaggerates the seemingly solitary aspects of human existence to the detriment of communal aspects. Collectivism makes the same mistake on a larger scale. For the collectivist, society comprises a bunch of separately existing, solitary (i.e. detached) individuals.
>
> Contrastingly, ubuntu defines the individual in terms of his or her relationship with others. Accordingly, individuals only exist in their relationships with others; and as these relationships change, so do the characters of the individuals. In this context, the word "individual" signifies a plurality of personalities corresponding to the multiplicity of relationships in which the

> individual in question stands. Being an individual, by definition, means "being-with-others." "With-others" is not an additive to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being; instead, both this being (the self) and the others find themselves in a whole wherein they are already related. This is all somewhat boggling for the Cartesian mind, whose conception of individuality must now move from solitary to solidarity, from independence to interdependence, from individuality vis-à-vis community to individuality à la community. (Bangura, 2005, p. 33)

Thus an individual's identity is not seen as separate from that of the relationships with others, and nor is ubuntu simply a collectivist mind-set, but rather a deeply relational concept.

Having addressed the significance of the context of learning with and through others in relationship, I turn now to another frequent critique of transformative learning theory – that of the separation and hierarchy of the roles of rationality and emotions in transformative learning (Clark & Dirkx, 2008; Dirkx, 2001, 2008; Dirkx et al., 2006; Taylor, 2001). Mezirow did indeed highlight the importance of the role of rational and cognitive critical reflection over that of affective learning, although in his 2000 article he did concede the importance of emotions and social dimensions in transformative learning. Taylor and Cranton (2012, p. 566) call for a cessation of the debate on the separation of rationality and emotions in transformative learning "because the very existence of rationality is rooted in the presence of emotion, without which [rationality] cannot exist." Dirkx (2008, p. 10), citing Brookfield, notes "the profoundly emotional, affect-laden context in which adult learning occurs." Within these contexts terms such as emotion, affect, moods and feeling are used interchangeably, and in this research no attempt is made to distinguish between them.

The very nature of emotion is differently ascribed by various scholars. Dirkx (2008) describes three main approaches which explain the nature of emotions: physiological; socially constructed; or embodied. Physiological approaches either define emotion as responses to particular stimuli, or as responses to particular stimuli but which are mediated through processes of appraisal, assessment or judgment. Yet other scholars hold that "emotions are fundamentally social constructions and entirely dependent on the particular contexts in which they are manifest" (Dirkx, 2008, p. 12). An emerging major approach is that of understanding emotions as embodied. Citing Lupton, Dirkx (2008, p. 13) writes that such a view of emotions holds that "embodiment is integral to, and inextricable from, subjectivity." What is sometimes termed 'gut feeling' can be more elegantly explained as an understanding that "emotion [is] a neurophysiological response to an external or internal stimulus, occurring within and rendered meaningful through a particular sociocultural context and discourse, and integral to one's

sense of self" (Dirkx, 2008, p. 13). It is this latter understanding of emotion that I adopt in my research.

Taylor's (2001) review of neurobiological perspectives of the role of emotions in learning draws on recent brain research. In the review he finds that emotions are "inherently cognitive" and, citing Parrot and Schulkin, "'anticipate future needs, prepare for actions, and even prepare for thinking certain types of thoughts'" (Taylor, 2001, p. 222). Taylor also notes that the process of reasoning can be guided or distorted by emotions, and that emotions are responsible for "filling the gaps often found in the slow and error-prone process of objective rationality" (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 223).

Thus the debate between Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" versus the notion of "I feel, therefore I am" is moot, and it can justly be claimed that "I think and feel, therefore I am". Perhaps Taylor's (2001, p. 221) observation that "it is very difficult for people to identify accurately emotions, reasoning processes, and their connection to each other, particularly since much of it happens on a tacit level" is a more accurate description of how the separation is reported. Whilst Mezirow was able to clearly explain the rational process of how meaning structures were altered through critical rationalising and discourse in order to find deeper and more robust meaning perspectives, it is a more complicated task to discuss an affective process that explains how perspectives are transformed. This research focuses in part on the "synergistic perspective of emotion and rationality" (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 567) in transformative learning experiences.

These alternate perspectives of transformative learning theory, Gunnlaugson's (2008) second wave, are viewed by Newman "as the kinds of extension and elaboration that go on in any theory making" (Newman, 2014, p. 347). More recently there have been calls for a more unified understanding of transformative learning theory, and in response to this Gunnlaugson (2008) and Hoggan (2016a, 2016b) have argued that the theory should be considered a metatheory or, as Howie and Bagnall (2013) argue, as a conceptual metaphor. In the next section I deal with transformative learning theory as a conceptual metaphor and as a metatheory.

3.2.4 Unifying the field of transformative learning theory

Transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor

That transformative learning theory can even be considered as a theory of adult learning is strongly argued by Howie and Bagnall (2013). They state that transformative learning theory is a persistent theory that has not attended to addressing various critiques over time, and should be viewed as a large-scale collaboration of the utilisation of the theory by practitioners,

and as descriptions of their applications of the theory. They argue further that transformative learning theory should be considered as a conceptual metaphor, and put forward several problematic areas to argue that this theory should in fact be a conceptual metaphor.

In their critical evaluation of transformative learning theory they cite four categories of the various critiques: circular arguments (a theory of social or individual change); identification of inadequacies in the theory (as set out in integral theories of transformative learning); elemental failure (for instance, the precise definition of the term 'transformative'); and philosophical differences (e.g. Mezirow's modernism vs postmodernism). Considering the range of the various critiques they argue that transformative learning theory is undertheorised, and if viewed as a conceptual metaphor will then result in a more unified approach to the theory.

A definition of a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 454) further contend that if "our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor." Howie and Bagnall (2013) make the case that 'transformation' and 'learning' are overlapping concepts: it can be argued that if one's thinking is transformed then learning has taken place, and conversely if one has learned something then one's thinking has been transformed. (See Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 821 for further discussion on these conceptual domains)

Howie and Bagnall (2013) argue that there are many reasons for problematic theorising in transformative learning theory, for instance the use of generalisations, jargon and ambiguous language, misdirected critiques aimed at scholars' claims and not at the theory per se, failure to define elements within the theory, theory unboundedness and colonisation of other concepts. In addition, they hold that there is a failure to validate transformative learning theory's impact on performance by some means of measurement, and that "data have been sought through the self-confirming framework of the theory" (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 825). Yet another critique is the lack of quantifiability of a measure of transformative learning, and they lament the "lack of quantifiability … because it leaves the theory subject to the vagaries and subjectivities of researchers and research participants" (Howie & Bagnall, 2013, p. 825). It is because transformation, like beauty, wealth and leadership for example, are subjective concepts that I consider this an unjustified criticism. It begs the questions: to whom does the transformation belong, and who is responsible for justifying the transformation, the person transformed or the promoter of this type of learning?

At the heart of calling for a repositioning of transformative learning theory as a conceptual metaphor lies the question of what constitutes theory. I reiterate the views from the previous

chapter of Fairhurst and Putnam (2004, p. 8) who state that "theory should direct attention and focus rather than characterize the intrinsic nature of stable objects or mirror fixed attributes among them."

Transformative learning theory as metatheory

Both Gunnlaugson (2008) and Hoggan (2016a, 2016b) propose that transformative learning theory be used as a metatheory. Gunnlaugson's focus is on the process of theorising, the development of a discourse of reflexivity, where the metatheorising looks hard at how first and second wave theories interact, and within each of the first and second wave theories. The outcome of this metatheorising is a weaving together of all contributions in a convincing but critical way (Gunnlaugson, 2008, p. 133). Hoggan's (2016a, 2016b) proposal for seeing transformative learning theory as a metatheory is to focus on learning outcomes reported in the literature. He puts forward a new model for determining if transformative learning has occurred by examining the depth, breadth and stability of transformation. Each of these two approaches is discussed in some detail in this section.

Looking to answer the question: "What are the key concepts and propositions that emerge within and between first- and second-wave theories of transformative learning?", Gunnlaugson (2008, pp. 131-132) proposes a provisional set of four requirements for a metatheoretical analysis of the literature on transformative learning theory. The purpose of such an analysis is to develop a balanced, inclusive, and comprehensive framework by considering these four points:

1. Developing an understanding of what the meta-issues and meta-questions are;

2. Developing a metatheoretical discourse that examines the conflation of first- and second-wave theorising which in turn could both provide the means to "better monitor the impact of the theory on practice" and compare transdisciplinary perspectives;

3. Establishing a metalanguage with inter-related terms in order to develop an integrating framework based on "bottom-up processes of knowledge creation from the broader TL community of scholar-practitioners"

4. A collaboration amongst all transformative learning theorists to agree where in the theory there is need for synthesis, and what aspects are "emerging or stand in isolation, [and] helping build linkages with more established areas once the existing pluralism of TL perspectives was sufficiently differentiated. (Gunnlaugson, 2008, pp. 131-132)

On the other hand, Hoggan's (2016a, 2016b) review of the literature looked to answer the question: "What are the ways in which transformations are manifested and reported?" Following the review he proposes six broad categories of learning outcomes, where the following changes are noted: worldview; self; ontology; epistemology; behaviour; and capabilities. He proposed a new definition for the metatheory of transformative learning "*Transformative learning* refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71) (italics in original). This definition moves away from defining transformation through altered meaning-making structures within a person to that of the consequences of transformative learning.

Hoggan argues that the changed learning outcomes should have depth, breadth and relative stability, where "[d]epth refers to the impact of a change … [b]readth refers to the number of contexts in which a change is manifest" (Hoggan, 2016a) and relative stability is irreversible change. This model is strongly aligned with the concepts of lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning in adult education.

3.3 Fostering transformative learning

Underpinning the theory of transformative learning is a perennial question of how this type of learning can be fostered. Cranton (2000, 2006a, 2006b), Cranton and Wright (2008) and Mezirow (1981, 1990, 1991b, 1995b, 1997) have written extensively on the educator's role in promoting transformative learning. In this section I briefly outline Taylor's (2009a) elements that frame such an approach to transformative learning, and then focus specifically on dialogue, as it is a key form of the pedagogic approach in the Nexus programme.

Taylor (2009a) has identified six, perhaps seven, core elements to be considered when planning transformative educational experiences. These elements are: prior experiences of the individual, the promotion of critical reflection amongst learners, engagement in dialogue with self and others, acknowledgement of affective and relational ways of learning (holistic approach), awareness of local and broader contextual factors, and the establishment of authentic relationships in the learning context. Taylor goes on to question whether a learner-centred teaching approach could also be included as one of the core elements.

In reconceptualising business education, Longmore, Grant, and Golnaraghi (2018) use a transformative learning approach to develop a workforce that has learning-oriented competencies such as abilities to think critically, solve problems, be mentally agile and to collaborate, among others. The learning model they propose holds that it is the whole learner that learns, that conduits to learning are previous experience, disjuncture (what Mezirow called disorienting dilemma), and critical reflection, that learning is emergent and socially constructed and that the instructor for this kind of learning assumes the role of facilitator and companion. Taylor's (2009a) considerations for planning transformative learning experiences overlap in many ways with what Longmore et al. (2018) propose, but it is interesting to note that Taylor opens the possibility of a learner-centred approach whilst Longmore et al. foreground the role of the facilitator in the learning experience.

Whilst this study did not set out to research the pedagogical practices of the Nexus programme, it is noteworthy that the teaching approach embraces all seven of the core elements identified by Taylor (2009a) and Longmore et al. (2018) in the preceding paragraphs.

I have previously discussed critical reflection, other ways of knowing, the role of emotions, the necessity of acknowledging context in transformative learning, and the importance of relationships. The case description of Nexus (in Chapter 5) and its participants will elucidate the range and diversity of experiences, as well as highlight historical, local and broader contextual factors.

This chapter concludes with a drawing together of Mezirow and others' focus on dialogue, Rule's (2015) many senses of dialogue and diacognition, and finally a review of how the practice of dialogue is imparted to the participants in this study.

3.4 Discussion on dialogue

For Mezirow (Mezirow, 2000b, 2012), dialogue is the means to validate our meaning-making following critical reflection and critical self-reflection. Discourse is the specialised use of dialogue for the purpose of "searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief. … Reflective discourse involves a critical assessment of assumptions" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 78). Mezirow describes the ideal conditions for dialogue where participants are able to fully and freely participate on the basis of:

- More accurate and complete information.
- Freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception.
- Openness to alternative points of view: empathy and concern about how others feel.
- The ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively.
- Greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflectiveness of assumptions, including their own.

- An equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse.
- Willingness to seek understanding and agreement and to accept a resulting best judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgment. (Mezirow, 2000a, pp. 13-14)

This full and free participation requires that there is provisional suspension of judgment about what is believed as the truth of the matter at hand until critical discourse results in a better judgment being in place. In order to achieve this, recognition of one's own and others' emotions, and managing one's own emotions is important, as well as having a focus on relationships (Mezirow, 2012).

However, 'dialogue' as a word is understood in many different senses. (See Rule (2015) for a discussion of the six senses used in his book *Dialogue and Boundary Learning*). Of these forms of dialogue, dialogue as talk, as mutual engagement, as being, and linked with Self and learning are the most pertinent. Dialogue as talk is understood as a conversation between two, maybe more, people who take turns to speak. It is open-ended, may be aimless, and the nature of the conversation is mediated by the relationships between the people and context. Such talk may include the use of shared codes. The outcome may be a consensual view, or what Rule terms 'allosensus' – the maintaining of different views but with appreciation for the views of the other. Dialogue as mutual engagement is a form of dialogue that has as an intended outcome the development of a mutual understanding or consensus. The seeking for common ground has an "emphasis on justice, truth, equality, peace-building and reconciliation" (Rule, 2015, p. xix).

Dialogue as being goes to the very heart of what it means to be human, and this sense of dialogue thus reflects an ontological dimension. Rule puts it this way: "to be human means to be in dialogue – with others, with oneself, with the world" (Rule, 2015, p. xix). The dialogical Self is that self that is constructed in and through dialogue. Dialogical Self is substantial, embodied, and extended in time and space. In an active sense the dialogical Self is positional, in a passive sense is socially constructed. These two particular senses of dialogue will be more fully explored in this study, as well as dialogue and learning.

Dialogue and learning are the means by which conscientisation can take place. In dialogue and teaching there are many levels: between teacher-student, student-teacher, between the word and world, and between action and reflection. In such a pedagogy all ideas are contestable, all voices valued and valuable, and disagreements are seen as opportunities for learning. Mezirow described this as free and full participation in discourse, as noted earlier.

Rule offers two other concepts useful in the exploration of dialogic learning. The first, dialogic space, is defined as a responsibly constructed and sustained zone of engagement where a

dynamic relation exists between and within participants, participants and subject matter, and participants and the world. Dialogic spaces are founded on a spirit of engagement rather than one of antagonism (Rule, 2015, p. xx). The second concept is that of diacognition, which is the result of a three-way layered interaction between dialogue (communication), cognition (thinking and reflecting), and positionality of persons (who) in teaching and learning. Rule defines diacognition as: "mutually constitutive acts of knowing that happen through and between teachers and learners in particular contexts" (Rule, 2015, p. 143) "in a dialogical process" (Rule, 2015, p. 166). The process of cognition is further qualified as learner's cognition, teacher's recognition and/or decognition (realisation of not knowing what was not known), and intercognition, which is the development of a common ground of knowing and understanding. Both teachers and learners can experience metacognition through the processes of reflection. Here Rule highlights the deliberate nature of dialogue, where the intent is to develop common ground and understanding.

Understanding dialogue and its practice is a main focus for Nexus participants. Their understanding draws on the more theoretical work of Bohm (1996), and more practically focused work of Isaacs (1999).

Bohm's view of dialogue derives from the Greek roots "dia" meaning through and "logos" which means word. Any number of people can be engaged in dialogue, including what Rule describes as dialogue with the Self as long as the Self is aware that it is engaged in a process of dialogue. Bohm's understanding of dialogue is marked by shared meaning in which everyone is a winner. His metaphor is that of a stream winding in and through the participants. Dialogue should happen in a circle thus signalling no hierarchy, there should be no leader or agenda, and opportunities for dialogue should take place frequently (he names a weekly interval) and over a long time (one to two years).

It is pertinent to note that "ubuntu rests upon dialogue, with its particularity, individuality and historicality. Ubuntu inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the differences of their humanness in order to inform and enrich our own" (Bangura, 2005, p. 32). Similar to Bohm's non-hierarchical view of dialogue, Bangura notes the following: "African style democracy operates in the form of (some times (sic) extremely lengthy) discussions. Although there may be a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, every person gets an equal chance to speak up until some kind of an agreement, consensus, or group cohesion is reached" (Bangura, 2005, p. 32).

Nexus participants and Programme Managers frequently reference four strands of dialogic learning: that of listening, respecting, suspending and voicing. Each of these practices requires an inner stilling of assumptions, opinions and thoughts. Listening is the capacity to

listen both outwardly and inwardly, to embrace and accept what is being said, and to let go of the 'inner clamouring'. There is an invitation to listen to the words and the silence between the words, and to listen beyond the net of our thoughts. "To listen is to develop an inner silence … The ways we have learned to listen, to impose or apply meaning to the world, are very much a function of our mental models, of what we hold in our minds as truths" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 84). Respecting derives from a stance of deep respect for and inclusion of the origination of the views of the other. It is a quest "for the springs that feed the pool of their [the other person's or persons'] experience" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 110). Respecting is being open to the fact that each of us may be taught something by another, and sees the potential that others carry inside them. Recognising the boundaries of others is not a distancing process, but rather an honouring of those boundaries.

Suspending stands in contrast to defending one's views: a process of suspending the certainty than underpins one's opinions and assumptions, whilst holding in tension that these assumptions are not suppressed nor do they need to be advocated. It is a loosening of a grip on assumptions in order to gain perspective. Suspending is "to observe one's thoughts and feelings … to bring [to] them a perspective and attention that can transform them" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 141). In voicing there must be a willingness to be still, and to trust the emptiness in dialogue. Voicing begins with listening first to one's internal emotional reactions, impulses and Self, and asking of oneself: "What needs to be expressed here, and by whom, and for what purpose? What is trying to emerge?" Voicing is thus an action of creation.

Gunnlaugson (2007, p. 147), drawing on the work of Bohm, Isaacs, Kegan, Mezirow, Scharmer and Wilber, argues that the generative dialogue process may be sufficient to produce a transformation, and also that a disorienting dilemma is not always the necessary catalyst. The generative dialogue process comprises "meta-awareness, vision-logic, multiple intelligences, multiple ways of knowing, suspension, and presencing" (Gunnlaugson, 2007, p. 147).

This discussion on dialogue opened with Mezirow's (2012) description of the conditions for full and free discourse. Broader understandings of dialogue from Rule (2015), Bohm (1996) and Isaacs (1999), as well as Afrocentric perspectives were then elucidated. The common thread that holds these together is a search for a dependable, defensible best explanation for understanding. Mezirow (2012, pp. 79-80) writes that a best

> judgment is always tentative until additional evidence, argument, or a different perspective is presented that may change it. This is why it is essential to seek out and encourage viewpoints that challenge prevailing norms of the dominant culture in matters of class, race, gender, technology, and environmental protection.

3.5 Bringing it all together

In this chapter I have attempted to explain the movements and changes in a very long-standing, broad and large conversation about explaining a type of learning in adulthood. At the very heart of this type of learning is a sincere effort by those who have experienced an inner shift, sometimes betrayal, of the way they interpret, understand and interact with the world to find renewed and more robust means to understand their world.

Transformative learning theory, as originally theorised by Jack Mezirow from the late 1970s, focused on how meaning structures were transformed through phases of meaning-making, and through processes of reflection and discourse. Mezirow placed great emphasis on nuanced differences in meaning structures and certainly ascribed transformation in meaning structures to the result of cognition. As Mezirow continued to refine and develop this theory there were many critiques about his lack of acknowledgement of other factors that could affect transformations in meaning structures. Such factors included how context might impact transformation, that there were affective, relational and social dimensions to explain transformative learning, and that Mezirow had ignored or downplayed the importance of action and social change as an outcome of transformative learning.

Further to this, Merriam (2017, p. 26), from a critical social science perspective, poses the question “Can transformative learning take place if one is not exposed to alternative ways of thinking about an issue or problem?”. From this perspective, the focus shifts from the individual learner to how the social context where learning takes place is constructed. Questions about factors such as power dynamics, race, gender and class are addressed within a critical social science approach.

Brookfield (2001) describes five salient features of what is critical in a critical theory of adult learning. He notes firstly “that critical theory is firmly grounded in a particular political analysis … [notably in] the conflicting relationship between social classes within an economy based on an exchange of commodities” (p. 10). A second feature of critical theory is its concern that people may not have the necessary knowledge or understanding to free themselves from oppression in order to change the world. This is linked to the third characteristic which holds that the validity of a “critical theory of adult learning, therefore, is the extent to which adults believe the theory captures their hopes and dreams” (p. 12). As such critical theory differs from others in that it breaks down the separations between researcher and researched. A fourth defining characteristic is that critical theory is normatively situated: it both criticises societal structures, and works towards a fairer more inclusive world. The final feature is “that verification of the theory is impossible until the social vision it inspires is realized” (p. 12). Merriam summarises this approach as “the context where learning takes place matters and it

is important to relentlessly challenge the inequities of the learning context" (Merriam, 2017, p. 27).

From the 1990s through this decade, the 2010s, research and writings on transformative learning theory burgeoned, driven by the desire to understand the multiple ways in which transformative learning might be theorised. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Edward Taylor was to conduct at least five meta-analyses of transformative learning theory research. Researchers such as Baumgartner, Belenky, Cranton, Dirkx, Hoggan, Kegan, Stanton, Tisdell and Tolliver, amongst many others, explored other ways of knowing, under the umbrella of transformative learning. This is what Gunnlaugson referred to as second wave theorising and during this time transformative learning became quite fragmented, and led in part to Newman's mutinous thoughts about whether this theory was a unique and universal explanation of adult learning. Writers such as Dirkx, Mezirow, Cranton, Taylor, O'Sullivan, and Gunnlaugson brought the various strands of fragmentation together and presented integrative, integral or holistic models to explain transformative learning.

In the current decade efforts have been made to develop a more unified theory. Here the work of Gunnlaugson and Hoggan predominate. Both advocate for transformative learning theory as a metatheory. Howie and Bagnall however argue that transformative learning theory should be seen as a conceptual metaphor.

In this study I use third wave conceptions of transformative learning theory to analyse the data. However, the data sometimes speak so loudly to Mezirow's original theorising of learning and so I bring this lens to the data too.

As discussed earlier, Hoggan (2016a, p. 71) offers the following definition of transformative learning: "Transformative learning refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world." Here the emphasis lies on processes that cause irreversible changes in how meaning structures are transformed and the subsequent actions taken because of changed meaning structures.

Transformative learning theory has a vast literature that scholars have engaged with over the past four decades. The theory does run the risk of serving as an explanation for any 'good' learning (Newman, 2014) in any context. However, for those willing to have their truth challenged through a process of surfacing unexamined assumptions, and holding these up to the glare offered by the perspectives of others, transformative learning causes irreversible changes to both the epistemology and ontology of the person, as Hoggan claims.

In the next chapter I discuss the research design and methodology of this research.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

In the previous two chapters the literature on leadership was reviewed, and the theoretical framework that informs my understanding of this particular research was elucidated. In this chapter I reiterate the purpose and context of this study, as well as the key research questions. Next I outline my choice of paradigm and methodology. Then follows detail of how data were collected and analysed. I then go on to discuss measures that were implemented to ensure the quality of this study. My positionality with respect to this study is also discussed. Finally there is a discussion on ethical considerations and limits of this research. The chapter concludes with a summary of my research design and methodology.

4.1 Purpose and context

South Africa is readying itself for the sixth general elections in 2019 after 25 years of political democracy, and yet questions of social and economic equality are still being raised. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2016) South Africa has the sixth highest income per person in sub-Saharan Africa (after Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea, Botswana, Gabon, and Mauritius) and has the fifth highest Human Development Index after Seychelles, Mauritius, Botswana and Gabon. "At a regional level, Johannesburg tops the African list [of wealthiest cities in terms of ultra-high net worth and high net worth individuals], followed by Cape Town. Outside of South Africa, the continent's key wealth hubs include Cairo, Lagos and Nairobi" (2014, p. 28). Despite these indicators of South Africa's comparative economic well-being in sub-Saharan Africa and more generally within the continent, and its classification as a country with medium human development, it is also the country with the highest income inequality in the world. The Gini coefficient is used to measure the dispersion of the distribution of income within a country, where 0 represents equality and a value of 100 absolute inequality. At 63.4, South Africa's Gini coefficient during the period 2010 to 2015 is the highest in the world. The fraction of South Africans who live in near multidimensional poverty is 17.1%, and a further 1.3% live in severe multidimensional poverty (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016). However, in order for the government to be able to monitor poverty, Stats SA has various means to measure poverty reported as three poverty lines, one of which is the food poverty line, which is the amount of money required by a person to be able to buy enough food in order to consume 2,100 calories per day. In 2015 13.8 million people were below this food poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2017a, p. 14).

In 2014, His Excellency President Jacob Zuma was able to claim that great improvements had been made in South Africa when he said

> I related the good story of 20 years of freedom and democracy [in the February 2014 State of the Nation address]. We stated that South Africa is a much better place to live in than it was in 1994, and that the lives of millions of our people have improved. (Zuma, 2014)

Nevertheless, according to former President Zuma, South Africa still has to deal with the issues of poverty, inequality and unemployment which, he stated, is a consequence of moving from apartheid to a national democratic society. On 16 February, 2018 the newly-appointed President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, at the State of the Nation address acknowledged the following:

> We know that there is still a lot that divides us. We remain a highly unequal society, in which poverty and prosperity are still defined by race and gender. We have been given the responsibility to build a new nation, to confront the injustices of the past and the inequalities of the present. We are called upon to do so under difficult conditions. The state we are in as a nation is that while poverty declined significantly following the democratic breakthrough of 1994, we have seen reverses in recent years. Poverty levels rose in 2015, unemployment has gone up and inequality has persisted. For several years our economy has not grown at the pace needed to create enough jobs or lift our people out of poverty. Public finances have been constrained, limiting the ability of government to expand its investment in economic and social development. (South African Government News Agency, 2017)

At the time of writing South Africa is dealing with large-scale corruption in both the private and public sector, as well as the aftermath of a transition to a new national leadership. In addition and importantly, the architecture of apartheid still remains apparent, more generally in the world of business and society. For people who have recently moved or are moving into positions of management, it has become crucial for them to understand the multiplicities of socioeconomic forces within their workplaces. It was the need to begin creating more resilient and authentic networks across racial and business sector divides that gave rise to a portfolio of leadership programmes within the Centre for Leadership and Dialogue at GIBS. In Chapter 5, as part of the 'thick' description of the case, I will report on the build-up to and catalyst moment when Nexus was born.

Many nonformal leadership and democracy-building programmes are offered worldwide such as the US-based Highlander Folk School, Mississippi Center for Justice, Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, and Center for Courage & Renewal (Allen & Tucker, 2012), the

Philippine Youth Leadership Program (PYLP) (Ty, 2010) and, in South Africa, for example the Human Rights, Democracy and Development Project (John, 2009), and World Changers Academy (Cox, 2013). However, few are offered within the formal education milieu of post-graduate study in South Africa, as is the case of the Nexus programme at GIBS.

The Nexus programme was first offered in 2002 and by 2016 just over 850 people had participated in the programme (see Table in Chapter 5 for a summary of the data). Participants, typically aged from 25-35 years old, come from the business, government and civil society sectors, and have a few years of management work experience. During the eight-month long programme, Nexus participants meet on campus for experiential learning days, dinners with guest speakers in the early years of Nexus (or in more recent years, sessions or engagements in various formats with guest speakers), and for working groups (self-facilitated dialogue sessions). In addition, self-reflection is encouraged through the keeping of a journal, and in assignments in which their reflections on actions are recorded and critically engaged with. In addition, there is planning for and involvement in a community-based project.

The particular pedagogy used by Nexus of experiential learning and reflection, described in Chapter 5, has subsequently been used across the business school, within the academic programmes of the Master in Business Administration (MBA) and post-graduate diplomas, within corporate executive education programmes, and at international academic conferences at GIBS, such as the Academy of Management (AoM) Africa Conference in January 2013, and UNICON Directors' Conference (Mtongana, 2015) in April 2015. The purpose of incorporating experiential learning days (ELDs) followed by a facilitated reflection is to allow participants to understand more fully some of the tensions and dynamics at play in the South African socioeconomic and political reality.

As stated earlier, the apartheid legacy continues to shape all aspects of life and experience. When a group of business school participants returns from an ELD, a platform is created for everyone to discuss their perceptions and assumptions. The learning that emerges from such a pedagogic approach is not fully understood by those involved in designing and managing the programme. In the words of the programme coordinator for Nexus, Jadey Bosman, in 2014 "Ja, please do research on Nexus, then we'll be able to explain better to others what it's about." There is a sense from participants and stakeholders in the programme that profound learning happens. However, the nature of this learning and how to theorise this learning warranted further investigation, which was the focus of my research.

I now outline the process of defining my research questions before justifying and explaining my choice of research paradigm and methodology.

4.2 Key research questions

Agee (2009) describes the reflective process that supports the development of qualitative research questions. In the initial stages the researcher has a curiosity or interest in a phenomenon or process, and couches this interest as an overarching question. In my case the questions I was asking were: firstly, what exactly happens on Nexus in terms of how or what people learn; secondly, how does this learning impact personally and in response to South Africa's economic and political reality?

The key questions to be answered by this research were thus

1. What is the nature of learning in the Nexus programme?
2. What roles, if any, do emotion and relationships play in learning on the Nexus programme?
3. How does learning in the Nexus programme relate to personal development, broader lives and histories of learners?
4. How does participation in the Nexus programme relate to societal needs and to learning about leadership?

In order to answer these questions it was important to gather information from those people who were currently involved in the management of the programme, and past and current participants of the Nexus programme. The methods of data collection and how the data were analysed are discussed later in this chapter.

4.3 Choice of paradigm and methodology

The choice of methodology to answer particular research questions flowed from the epistemological position of the questions to be answered, and this choice was made on the basis of "the appropriate foundation for the study of society and its manifestations" (Bryman, 1984, p. 75). Positivists traditionally view social and natural science events from the outside, and their search is to "discover and measure independent facts about a single apprehendable reality, which is assumed to exist, driven by natural laws and mechanisms" (Riege, 2003, p. 77). Such research is marked by operational definitions, objectivity, replicability, causality, measurements (Bryman, 1984), and "theory confirmation in value-free, statistical generalisations" (Riege, 2003, p. 77). In such instances knowledge is deemed warrantable (Bryman, 1984). However, it should be noted that while much of positivist research is based on statistics it is not all exclusively so. On the other hand, the researcher who wants to get close to her or his subjects in order to find some of the "enigmatic qualities of the complexities of social phenomena" (Bryman, 1984, p. 82) views knowledge as *verstehen*, a participatory

and “empathic understanding of human behaviour” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). This approach wants to see the world through the eyes of the actors, and to develop a sensitivity in the contextual understanding (Bryman et al., 1996) of the research. Such a researcher chooses qualitative methodology, and this research is conducted using this methodology.

Qualitative research also allows for explorations of a “phenomenon involving complex temporal dynamics … embedded in nuanced social interactions” (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012, p. 279), and to deepen aspects of theory through paying attention to the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals. Transformative learning theory is well theorised, but such qualitative research can serve to complement and extend the theory. Graebner et al. (2012) also foreground how qualitative research serves to explain an abstract idea, in the case of this study learning on Nexus, in a convincing and reliable manner.

This qualitative research was conducted in the interpretivist paradigm, since it sought to understand how and what learners in the Nexus leadership programme learnt and how such learning related to their lives. “The central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 21). The research questions were best answered through a deep examination of the data and rich, situated descriptions of learning were explored and analysed. Since this research did not seek to hypothesise the efficacy of the application of what was being learnt and how this occurred, the appropriate approach was deemed to be through qualitative research that allowed for probing and responding to leads given by the participants. Because the focus of this research was on “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28), a qualitative methodology using case study was chosen.

4.3.1 Case study research

The methodological approach selected was a case study since “the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a ***case***) … over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving ***multiple sources of information*** … and reports a ***case description*** and ***case themes***” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97) (emphasis in the original). Merriam (1998, p. 27) sees the case as “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries.” In this instance, the bounded system was the Nexus programme from the time of its inception in 2002 to 2016, the year of completion of data gathering. The data collection methods included observations, focus groups, semi-structured interviews with participants and programme managers, and document analysis. The case description appears in Chapter 5, and case themes are

discussed in Chapters 6 to 8.

Case studies are further "distinguished by the size of the bounded case … and in terms of the intent of the case analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 99). This was a single case, Nexus, which was further characterised as an intrinsic case study where "the focus is on the case itself … because the case presents an unusual or unique situation" (Creswell, 2013, p. 100). In contrast, a case study that seeks to understand a specific issue or problem is called an instrumental case. Rule and John (2011, p. 9) hold that for an intrinsic case study, "the interest is in the case itself as a unique or innovative situation that is worth understanding more fully." As described earlier in this chapter on the purpose and context of this study, Nexus is unusual in that it is a nonformal adult education offering situated in an institution that predominantly offers formal adult education programmes. The curriculum that is followed in the programme is not defined by specific content, and the focus falls rather on the processes of helping participants to develop skills necessary for critical self-reflection and challenging the assumptions they hold through socially constructed meaning-making in dialogue.

Merriam describes the features of case study as particularistic, descriptive, or heuristic. Particularistic case studies focus on a particular phenomenon, or situation or programme, and "the case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon", whereas a descriptive case study has as its outcome a '"thick" description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-30). The heuristic case study describes the "reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). This case study of the Nexus programme was both particularistic and descriptive. Creswell (2013, pp. 98 - 99) contends that the sign of a good qualitative case study "is that it presents an *in-depth understanding* of the case" (italics in original) as well as "both a description of the case and themes or issues that the researcher has uncovered in studying the case." Rule and John (2011) also discuss some of the various types of case studies that exist. Citing Stenhouse (Rule & John, 2011, p. 9) the style for this research was that of an educational case study, which "is concerned with understanding educational action rather than evaluating it."

In order to achieve a thick and rich description that allows the reader to be able to get the in-depth understanding of this educational action many forms of data were collected: a "behind-the-scenes" (etic) view of Nexus was garnered from interviews with the programme managers and from various documents generated by them; an "insiders'" (emic) view came from focus groups with past participants that were held in order to determine themes that warranted further exploration and, additionally, a life story approach was used in constructing the case (John, 2009) where six participants were interviewed. Documents generated by participants such as evaluations and reflective assignments were also analysed, and observations were

conducted (discussed later in this chapter).

The key research questions (as listed in 4.2) explore the nature of learning on Nexus, what role, if any, emotions and relationships play in this form of learning, and how this learning may have impacted the individual's lives and their responses to societal issues or needs. Following each focus group, my impression was one of a fruitful, exploratory and appreciative enquiry demonstrated by all but one of the participants.

Having obtained data from three focus groups that described a broad sense of the learning on Nexus, to find out more about how Nexus may have interrupted a life course or indeed may have shifted thinking with respect to the societal issues of this country, a life story approach was adopted. A description of the life story approach and the justification for using this research method now follows, drawing predominantly on the works of Harrison (2009) and Plummer (2001).

4.3.2 Life story approach

Harrison (2009, p. xxi) notes that the life story approach is "a broad field of research endeavour in the social sciences in which people's lives as a whole, or in part, are data for understanding the complex two-way relationship between self and social context." She notes further that this approach "generally encompasses a number of methodological approaches which put individuals, their lives, their experiences and the contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront of both theoretical and substantive concerns and foci for investigation." Given that the third research question focused on how learning on Nexus may relate to participants' personal development and broader lives, six Nexus participants were invited to share their life stories so that their lives, experiences and context could become the focus of the investigation. Plummer (2001, p. 7) describes life story research as a "strand of work that highlights the active human subject … the need to see experience and life as a fluctual praxis, always in flow and ever messy."

The reason for choosing a life story approach was because of the fit with the research questions. Life stories, or life histories, are portrayals of an individual's entire life in its multi-layered complexity (Creswell, 2013). Life stories are a means of

> getting close to living human beings, accurately yet imaginatively picking up the way they express their understandings of the world around them, perhaps providing an analysis of such expressions, presenting them in interesting ways, and being self-critically aware of the immense difficulties such tasks bring. (Plummer, 2001, p. 2)

I wanted to get detailed descriptions of individuals' experiences in the context of the time and space in which they live, and their reflections on the understanding of their culture, home, and social, work and personal experiences. I wanted to know as much as I could of the stories of individuals' lives, and to hear in their own voice, "how they see their life unfolding" (Plummer, 2001, p. 123).

I will explain later in this section about the sampling strategy but for noting here, I decided to approach six Nexus participants from different racial groups. This was deemed to be important given that South Africa's apartheid past means that the context of the life stage may have been impacted by the race of the person. Plummer (2001, p. 128) puts it this way:

> Lives need to be located on a '*historical time line*' and through their demographic features. A life occurs within a definite historical timespan. A line of key world events [or national events] can be drawn which 'situates' a life firmly within its specific cultural history. … [The researcher's awareness] of historical time [can raise her consciousness of] … how different lives are shaped through different historical baselines and different historical roots.

South Africa is still a relatively new democracy, and Nexus participants may well have experienced the laws of apartheid first hand, or through how their parents or grandparents reported how they lived through it.

Semi-structured interviews with the six Nexus participants were the only means used to get the data for the life stories. More details of life story interviews is discussed in 4.4.2 Phase Two. The interview questions first established stories about the upbringing of the person being interviewed, then probed for reflections on learning in Nexus and the impact of Nexus in their place of work and in their personal lives. Trust emerged from the focus group discussions as a particular theme to be probed. The participants in the life stories were thus also asked to reflect on whether they felt that trust was a part of the learning experience in Nexus and if so, how they could support their answer. Finally, they were asked if they had found a safe space in Nexus to have challenging conversations. The schedule of questions is found in Appendix 3.

4.4 Sampling

A purposive sample was designed according to the following criteria: Some study participants would be drawn from the focus groups, and others would be 'cold-called' by the Nexus programme management team, in accordance with permissions granted by the organisation to do this research. It was important to have representation from those who had done the

programme in the early 2000s and then from some who had participated more recently in Nexus. In addition, it was planned that there be an equal distribution amongst the racial groups and gender.

The analysis of these written records provided the basis for the schedule used with the focus groups, and the interview schedule for the programme management team. For both data sources a purposive sample was used. In noting how a researcher determines who should be a participant in the sample, Creswell (2013, pp. 155 - 157) states that, in a narrative study, the researcher reflects "more on whom to sample – the individual may be convenient to study because she or he is available, a politically important individual who attracts attention or is marginalized, or a typical ordinary person."

The management team was purposively selected in order for them to tell their stories and interpretations about how the programme is presented, and what continuous improvements have been made to the programme over time.

> This means that the enquirer selects individuals … for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Decisions need to be made about who or what should be sampled, what form the sampling will take, and how many people … need to be sampled. (Creswell, 2013, p. 156)

The sample thus included Carrie Pratt, lead facilitator, and Leon Mdiya, learning designer, who are not full-time employees of GIBS. Carrie was contracted to design, direct and facilitate Nexus, and Leon designs ELDs and facilitated this component of Nexus. At the start of this research in 2014 and 2015 Jadey Bosman was the Programme Coordinator responsible for the administrative tasks and logistics of presenting Nexus. In 2016 she was promoted to Programme Manager of Nexus. Also in 2014 and 2015 Carmelita Davey was Programme Manager of Nexus and in 2016 she was promoted to Senior Programme Manager. The role of the Programme Manager is to market the programme, plan and design the learning interventions, and to manage the learning processes with Nexus participants. A Senior Programme Manager has strategic oversight over several programmes within the Centre for Leadership and Dialogue, and also has responsibilities to market Nexus.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the focus group. In order to survey participants of different gender, employment sector, year of Nexus participation and race, I planned to hold three focus groups, one from the public or government sector, one from the private of business sector and one from civil society. Each focus group was planned to be comprised of four men and four women, and furthermore the group was also planned to

comprise two from each racial group of Black, Coloured, Indian and White. It was also planned that the sample would draw two Nexus participants each from the years of 2002-2004, 2005 - 2007, 2008-2010, and 2011-2014.

Thus it was felt that in order to explore learning in the Nexus programme, a case study of the programme, with embedded life story narratives, was selected as the most appropriate methodology. I now move on to a more detailed description of how data were collected.

4.5 Data collection

Data were gathered in two phases. In the first phase, historical participants' evaluations of the Nexus programme, amongst other documents, were analysed in order to generate questions for semi-structured interviews with the programme managers of Nexus. A sample of such an interview is found in Appendix 3. Themes that emerged from the interviews with the programme managers were used as the framework for probing during three focus groups. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected Nexus participants, using a life story approach.

4.5.1 Phase One

In 2015, in preparation for collecting data from the programme, Phase One included a review of the written records from the past 12 years to

- analyse the demographic composition of the Nexus participants since programme inception, in order to purposefully sample for the planned three focus groups, and
- identify key themes that emerged from the documents and identify trends in prescribed readings.

In Phase One the Programme Management team of four people were interviewed in order to get data that explained the real 'lived' experience of planning and executing the Nexus programme. In addition, three focus groups were planned. Each of these strategies is now discussed below.

Document analysis

Bowen's (2009) description of how to conduct document analysis includes firstly reading the documents at a superficial level, then a more thorough examination, and finally a phase of interpretation. In Phase One, documents were selectively sourced from the Nexus Shared Folder at GIBS and collected together in one folder on my computer named "Nexus documents". Bowen (2009, p. 31) notes that document analysis "requires data selection, instead of data collection" in order to not amass large amounts of data which do not contribute to the case. The source folder had documents filed according to each year of the programme,

and within each year an idiosyncratic sorting was noted. In addition, the first year of Nexus coincided with the initial start of the business school and the prevailing attitude in the early start-up years was one of ‘plan well, know what the planned outcomes must be and execute’. Record keeping was not well done and the historical records show this.

After skimming the documents, a preliminary categorisation was developed and documents were filed according to type and purpose. The documents were then read more thoroughly in order to ensure that the categorisation was appropriate for the purposes of this research and that there were no redundancies in the classifications. At this stage some documents were discarded because the record contained insufficient detail or they did not contribute to the case. Documents were selected on the relevance of the data contained therein to provide: context to the case either through background information or historical insights; additional questions for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups; supplementary research data; evidence of developments or changes over time; or verifying or contradicting evidence (Bowen, 2009).

The documents were selected because of their fit with the conceptual framework of the study, and were filed as follows: assignments; biographies and speaker profiles; Nexus general documents; delegates (Nexus participants); evaluation reports; guidebooks; Nexus research done by GIBS; presentations; programmes and annual schedules; readings and references; and, finally, working groups. Each document was renamed using the following format: year_document type_file name. This allowed me to track changes over time, as well as check if I had duplications of the same document. In the process of renaming the documents, further documents were discarded or refiled. Table 5 summarises the various classes of documents, the reason for selection, and the number and brief description of documents in each folder.

The document category that provided rich data for analysis was that of assignments. The other documents provided context and verification of facts for the case.

Table 5 *Categorisation of documents used for data analysis*

Category of document	Reason for selection of documents	Brief description of documents in folder	Number of documents in folder
Assignments	What content or processes were delegates asked to reflect on? How did Nexus participants reflect on particular focus areas?	Documents from 2009 to 2016 Instructions for assignments Responses by Nexus participants Feedback by facilitator on reflections	45 in total of which: 26 are instructions 19 are Nexus participant responses, of which 2 show facilitator feedback
Biographies and speaker profiles	Who was invited to address Nexus participants, and why? Who were the GIBS' role players, and how did they choose to position themselves?	Documents from 2010 to 2014 Various curricula vitae of guest speakers Profiles of GIBS programme managers	19 in total of which: 10 are speaker profiles 9 are GIBS' management or facilitator biographies
Nexus documents	What planning and marketing evidence is there? How did the programme change, and in response to what?	Documents from 2009 to 2017 Planning, marketing, preparations, summary notes, briefing documents, team reflections Authors are Nexus management team	18 in total Miscellany of documents
Delegates	What public record of Nexus participants? What was the demographic composition of a sample of Nexus classes?	Documents from 2009 to 2012 Sample of a few years of Nexus participants Other years' records not found	3 in total
Presentations	What information – content and processes – was conveyed to the Nexus participants?	Documents from 2010 to 2013	11 in total

Category of document	Reason for selection of documents	Brief description of documents in folder	Number of documents in folder
Evaluation reports	What were the Nexus participants reporting as immediate reflections after a day or event on Nexus? How were they reporting their reflections? In what ways were these reflections different from feedback received from classroom-based teaching in other sections in the school?	Documents from 2009 to 2016 Participants' ratings of events in a day on Nexus Participants' written feedback One instance of drawings of reflections by all Nexus participants	64 in total
Guidebooks	How was the programme explained to Nexus participants? What instructions and guidelines were given to Nexus participants?	Documents from 2012 to 2016 Guidebooks from each year	5 in total
Nexus research by GIBS	What research had been commissioned by GIBS, and when? Why was this research commissioned?	Documents from 2005 to 2009 Transcripts of several focus groups held in 2005 and 2008 Briefing documents for the focus groups	10 in total
Readings and references	What content was given to the Nexus participants? Was the literature on particular theories of leadership, or processes?	Documents from 2010 to 2016	42 in total
Working groups	How were working groups briefed? What other information was given to the working groups?	Documents from 2009 to 2104	17 in total

Semi-structured interviews with programme management team

Semi-structured interviews with the programme management team comprising Carrie, Leon, Carmelita and Jadey took place in September and October 2015. The shortest interview was with Jadey which was 40 minutes long and the longest interview, Leon, was 1 hour 10 minutes. I transcribed the first interview, which was with Carrie.

This data was collected first in order to enable me to later draw up a schedule of questions for the focus group discussion and an interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews with the purposive sample of the participants: it allowed me to prompt the participants about how they had experienced the programme.

Focus groups

The choice to interview past participants in a focus group was because I wanted to get a range of views and a sense of the diversity of learning experiences from a large sample of people, and at the same time to do this as efficiently as possible. More importantly, I wanted to note the interaction between the focus group members (Cohen et al., 2007; Rule & John, 2011), and the shifts in meaning that came from dialogue that was generated by the members (Rule & John, 2011). Focus groups provide a collective view of the topic under discussion, and so later I planned to interview individuals in order to probe more deeply.

For each focus group, research participants were invited to attend a two-hour early dinner at GIBS. Each focus group was both video and audio recorded with informed consent obtained from all members. The focus group questions are to be found in Appendix 3.

Cohen et al. (2007) recommend that the size of a focus group should be four to six people, whilst Rule and John (2011) recommend that there be six to twelve people. In addition, it is suggested that there be over-recruitment by 20% (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007) in order to accommodate those who cannot or do not come to the focus group. It appeared that recruiting ten people per focus group would hopefully mean that between six and eight people would form the focus group. In reality, the smallest focus group had three people attend and the largest had five. Despite the relatively small sizes of these focus groups, the views and opinions expressed during these sessions were extensive, rich and diverse and provided enough data to generate themes to be further explored.

The debatable quality of data generated by the relatively small sizes of the focus groups may have been mitigated by two factors: firstly, Nexus working groups (explained in Chapter 6) are self-facilitated dialogue sessions that have a purpose of exploring meaning and developing deeper understanding, and the focus group members displayed their familiarity with holding such a dialogue; and, secondly, the composition of each focus group was such that all were

relative strangers to each other (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007). The lack of familiarity with each other meant that the focus group participants freely explored their experiences of the Nexus programme and reflected on their learning without previously established commonalities.

Permission to invite selected past Nexus participants was given through the programme co-ordinator at GIBS because this meant I had to be given access to personal information of the participants. The invitation to participate in this research stated that I was interested in obtaining views on what had been learnt in Nexus on leadership and that this was research for a PhD that focused on learning of adults. The text for this invitation is found in Appendix 2. Invitations to participate in the focus group were sent out in September and October 2015. This proved to be bad timing in South Africa because the months of November to January meant a limited access to people's time. The long annual summer holidays are taken from mid-December through to mid-January. In addition, year-end activities predominate in November and December, and in January people are readying themselves for the year. The first focus group, with those from the private sector, took place in early February 2016, with the remaining two other focus groups completed within a month of the first focus group.

Although eight people had agreed to come to the first focus group, in the week and even hours leading up to the appointed time for the focus group discussion several study participants withdrew, leaving a group of only four men present. The discussion was richly informative and animated, and it was apparent that the understanding of how to hold a dialogue was still understood by those who attended. My notes after the focus group concluded show the following interaction on Skype message with my manager, Professor Helena Barnard, who asked how things had gone at the focus group: "Hi Helena thanks for checking in (Nexus speak) 4 people all men and it was hard to shut them down at the end ☺ They loved it – I just hope Ive (sic) asked the right questions", to which she responded, saying "That is typical of qual – hard to get them, and then they cannot stop … VIVA! Sleep well".

Each focus group discussion took place in the same room at GIBS, and a light dinner was provided. The focus group members each gave informed consent to participate in the research, as well as agreement to be both audio and video recorded. The first focus group commenced at 18h00 but for the subsequent meetings the start time was changed to 17h30 because it meant an earlier concluding time – this was in response to feedback from the first focus group. Although Cohen et al. (2007) state that a disadvantage of focus groups is that it is a contrived setting, many of those who came to the focus groups said it felt just like being back at a Nexus session, and that they were looking forward to having another GIBS' dinner.

After the first focus group it was decided to change the plan from having only those from the

government or civil society in one focus group. It was simply too difficult to get enough people to respond to the invitation to be part of a focus group on Nexus, let alone finding the correct demographic composition to meet on a particular night. This change in plan also meant that I did not target Nexus participants from specific years as noted in Section 4.4. Details of the dates, participant pseudonyms and demographic details are provided in Table 6. Table 7 summarises the diversity of gender, race, sector and years of Nexus participation of the three focus groups.

Table 6 *Focus group participant details*

Date	Focus group	Participant pseudonym	Gender	Race	Sector	Nexus year
2 February 2016	FGD 1	Buyani	Male	Black	Private	2002
		Pierre	Male	White	Private	2007
		Tebatso	Male	Black	Private	2013
		Avinash	Male	Indian	Private	2011
26 February 2016	FGD 2	Leazal	Female	Coloured	Government	2013
		Mandla	Male	Black	Government	2007
		Sammy-Jane	Female	Coloured	Civil Society	2014
1 March 2016	FGD 3	Luleka	Female	Black	Government	2006
		Lerushka	Female	Indian	Private	2006
		Lexie	Female	White	Private	2010
		Joe	Male	White	Civil Society	2013
		Ajman	Male	Black	Private	2014

Table 7 *Summary of characteristics of focus groups*

Gender	Race	Sector	Nexus years
5 Female	5 Black	2 Civil society	3 from 2002 to 2006
7 Male	2 Coloured	3 Government	4 from 2007 to 2011
	2 Indian	7 Private	5 from 2012 to 2015
	3 White		

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore how Nexus participants reported their understanding of the nature of their learning on the programme as well as to refine the life story interview questions, and to further select those participants with an interesting story to tell. From this group of 12 people, three were then chosen to be interviewed again. In this

way quality of research was ensured through hearing from multiple sources of people involved in Nexus. In addition, Creswell (2013, p. 157) notes that

> maximum variation sampling … increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences in different perspectives – an ideal in qualitative research … The size question is an equally important decision to sampling strategy in the data collection process. One general guideline for sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied … to elucidate the particular, the specific.

Focus group discussions allowed me to collect data on how the Nexus participants reported on their learning, and to probe more deeply on the presence, or not, of emotions and relationships in this learning. In addition, the focus group discussions allowed me to observe the interactions between participants and to observe dynamics between the group members who were all relative strangers to each other.

4.5.2 Phase Two

A further purposeful sample of six people was selected for life stories. Citing Erikson, Plummer (2001, p. 133) writes the following about selecting the lives to be studied.

> 'Sampling is the strategy of persons who work with vast universes of data: it is a strategy of plenty' (Erikson, 1973:15). Conversely, life history research is the strategy of the poor – of the researcher who had little hope of gaining a large representative sample for which bold generalizations could be made.

I planned to interview six people for their life stories, three men and three women, two each of Black and White, and then the other two either Indian or Coloured. I also wanted a spread of years for Nexus participation. Three of the six life history participants had come from the focus groups, two were nominated by Carrie (the lead facilitator) chosen because of their scepticism of Nexus, and the final person was nominated by an outsider to this research but who had heard one of the delegates on a management programme talking about how powerfully she had experienced Nexus – her profile as an Indian woman completed the last part of the planned sample matrix.

Life story interviews

Six semi-structured interviews to elicit life stories were held from September to December 2016. A summary of participant names, gender and race as well as details of the interview

are found in Table 8. The semi-structured interviews took place at a date, time and place nominated by the person to be interviewed. After obtaining the necessary permissions and informed consent, each interview was audio recorded and transcribed.

Table 8 *Life story interviews: participants' pseudonyms, demographics, and interview details*

Date	Participant pseudonym	Gender	Race	Site for interview	Duration of interview
14 Sep 2016	Ian	Male	White	Work	1 hour 20 minutes
26 Sep 2016	Lexie *	Female	White	GIBS	1 hour 15 minutes
29 Sep 2016	Avinash *	Male	Indian	Home	2 hours 25 minutes
6 Oct 2016	Yadhina	Female	Indian	Work	1 hour
30 Nov 2016	Lawrence	Male	Black	Work	2 hours 5 minutes
5 Dec 2016	Luleka *	Female	Black	GIBS	2 hours 25 minutes
Summary	* Drawn from focus groups	3 females 3 males	2 Black 2 Indian 2 White	1 at home 2 at GIBS 3 at place of work	Shortest: 1 h Longest: 2h:25 Average time 1h:45

Observations

Observations of a working group and an Experiential Learning Day (ELD) were made. For the working group, field notes and an audio recording was made, and for the ELD only field notes were kept. Informed consent was given by all participants that I observed, and permission to audio record the working group was also granted.

The working group session (see section 1.3 for a fuller description of working group) that was observed was the close out session for the year and this took place on 28 October 2015. I observed only part of the final day's programme from 14h00 -16h30. The working group is a subset of the cohort, and after the working group session, the whole cohort met for a celebratory dinner. I declined the invitation to join this part of the day's programme because I thought it more important that an intimacy between the Nexus participants be honoured.

Table 9 provides details of the participants of the working group. In this table I do not provide details of the sector in which the participants work as there were no other indicators in the room of where they were employed. It also became increasingly difficult to get representation from government and civil society and so the diversity was more on gender, race and organisation.

Table 9 *Working group participants and demographic details*

Pseudonym	Race	Gender
Tebang	Black	Male
Ngao	Black	Female
Jann	White	Female
Laurie	White	Female
Boss	Black	Male
Henry	White	Male
Niel	White	Male
Pravin	Indian	Male

Nearly a year later I accompanied a Nexus group to Diepsloot on an experiential learning day (ELD) on 13 August 2016. The day began at 08h00 with breakfast provided and during this time the participants were briefed. This was the third ELD of the year, and was designed with a future orientation in mind. The day's theme was titled "Into the arena - creating new possibilities". Carrie introduced the topic for the day, as well as introducing me to the group. At this stage informed consent documents were distributed and signed.

A summary of the data sources, sampling method and data collection methods is summarised in Table 10.

Table 10 *Summary of data sources, sampling and data collection methods*

Phases	Data source	Sampling method	Sample size	Data collection
Phase One	Class lists	None	1 000	Summary of demographic data
	Past participants	Purposive	12	Focus groups
	Programme management	Purposive	4	Semi-structured interviews
	Documents and artefacts	Programme notes, prescribed readings, programme evaluations, prior focus group studies, any other prior research notes, participant essay responses		
Phase Two	Past participants	Purposive	6	Life stories
	Programme events	Convenience	2 events	Observations
	Participant assignments	Convenience	19 assignments	Documents

4.6 Data analysis

As discussed above, data were gathered in two phases and all through the collection process data were analysed. In the first phase, documents were organised and analysed in order to develop a schedule of interview questions to ask the Nexus programme managers. This interview schedule (see Appendix 3) was compiled from data reported mainly in programme evaluations and from the guide book. The significance of some documents for learning or programme planning was also probed in the interviews with the managers.

All subsequent interviews, focus groups, the observation of a working group, and life story interviews were transcribed through a transcription service provider. All transcriptions were checked for misheard words or phrases, grammar and punctuation. The voice recordings and cleaned transcriptions have been copied to a DVD and are in storage at UKZN. The interviews with the four programme managers were transcribed and during the process of checking the transcripts against the voice recordings initial points of interest in the data were noted in my research journal. Relying predominately on these initial interviews, and to a lesser extent on the programme evaluations, 'prompt' questions for the focus group were drawn up. These questions were discussed with my supervisor, and alignment with the key research questions was also checked (see Appendix 3).

After each focus group discussion preliminary impressions were noted in field notes. These notes included both reflections on the data gathering process as well as the overall sense I got from the discussion. These notes were added to the front end of the transcriptions of each focus group. Box 1 shows a sample of notes made after the third focus group discussion:

Box 1: Field notes from FGD3 March 1, 2016

Discussion scheduled to begin at 18h00 and by 17h50 no-one had yet arrived. My notes have the word "Yikes" written down.
Some FG participants had some interaction professionally with each other – Lerushka and Luleka may have done Nexus at the same time (they weren't sure); Lerushka had 'met' Joe via email through her company; Lexie had been to an experiential learning day she arranged through Leon with Ajman (not GIBS related).
By 18h00 four people had arrived but soon after we started Ajman arrived.
This was the most serious and reflective of the three sessions. Notes that I made the next day include
Introspection
Space, space, space
Powerful stories of healing/acceptance/connection

The data from focus group discussions and interviews with the programme managers were read through and analysed at a relatively superficial level to ascertain what themes or questions needed further elucidation in the life story interviews. Again, the interview schedule was shared with my supervisor, alignment with research questions checked and the schedule finalised (see Appendix 3).

The process of data gathering was thus informed by ongoing data analysis. Preliminary data analysis allowed me to ask questions where gaps in understanding had been identified, or to further probe areas of interest that emerged in the data.

Once all interviews and focus group discussions had been transcribed, the data rested while the chapter on transformative learning theory was finalised.

The data were then, in the first wave of analysis, globally coded. The question to be answered for each transcript was "What are the three or four main stories that this data is telling?". During this process what began to become apparent to me was the sense that apartheid's long shadow remains over many lives in this country. Global coding allowed me to get reacquainted with the data, as well as to get to know the data, and provided first impressions of what was contained in the data.

In the second wave of analysis, data were inductively coded. Here the questions to be answered were "What are the data telling us about how and why learning happened, and how did this learning impact the lives of learners?" During this phase codes had already begun to emerge during the data gathering and data management process, what Roberts and Wilson (2002) refer to as a coding up process.

Despite significant support from my supervisor, I found the process of coding very difficult. I initially used AtlasTI to code the data but generated so many codes that it made the process of distillation impossible to do. I then returned to the hard copies of the data where it was easier for me to see the stories in the data. Marshall's (2002) article makes reference to the role of emotions in qualitative analysis. She contrasts two approaches to analysing qualitative data: that of good housekeeping through using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Systems (CAQDAS) such as AtlasTI, or that of alchemists who use creativity in their analysis that is unfettered by the rules imposed by using CAQDAS. This was not the difficulty I felt: I was uncertain about what the rules of good housekeeping are and did not feel enough of an alchemist to carry out the magic required to transform the data into usable themes and categories.

Feldman (1995, cited in Marshall, 2002, p. 58) provides the following powerful citation which sums up the confusion I felt, but also a release from trying to get to the 'correct' solution:

> Starting to create an interpretation is like trying to start a jigsaw puzzle that has a million indeterminate pieces. To make this puzzle more confusing, there is no unique solution. That is, one piece may fit with many other pieces. Imagine, in addition, that the picture consists almost entirely of shades of gray (imagine a jigsaw puzzle of a Rothko painting) so that one does not get immediate clues about the fit of the pieces from the picture that forms. (Marshall, 2002, p. 58)

This article by Marshall provides further useful guidelines for qualitative data analysis which includes the invitation to be reflexive, to take time, and time away from the data, and to accept that the unconscious has a role to play in analysis.

Coding the data inductively generated a model presented in Chapter 7 "The type of learning needs …" which honours the voices of Nexus participants.

The data were also analysed using codes generated by the research questions and the literature on transformative learning theory and leadership. During this deductive coding process AtlasTI was used and the codes are to be found in Appendix 4. The findings from deductive coding are reported and theorised in Chapters 8 and 9.

It is noted that there is a very rich dataset that has been generated in this study which bodes well for further publications from this research. The analysis work is not yet complete.

4.7 Quality measures of this research

Whilst quantitative research depends on measures of reliability and validity to ensure quality of research, researchers within the qualitative research tradition use alternative measures to ensure the quality of their research. The concepts of validity and reliability are replaced by trustworthiness of the research, where scholarly rigour is ensured by transparency and ensuring that professional ethical research is conducted. Cohen et al. (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 148) make the point that in qualitative research we want to understand the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations in a way that need not be replicable. Methodological rigour can be ensured through ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability (which takes the researcher's influences and biases into account) (Creswell, 2013, p. 246) neutrality, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 148). These measures ensure coherence towards generating findings that the research community can accept with confidence.

Riege (2003, pp. 81 - 82) provides a list of questions to be answered that give the assurance of the truth value of the findings. In order to be credible the researcher asks the question

“Could a participant in this study believe it?” To this end credibility is assured by rich, meaningful and “thick” descriptions, an internal coherence in the findings and systematic relationships between concepts. This is the research that is reported on in the remainder of this thesis. To demonstrate confirmability the researcher must be able to answer in her or his research “Are the study’s general methods and procedures described explicitly and in detail?” (Riege, 2003, p. 81) and is the data available to others for their analysis? In this chapter every attempt has been made to rigorously describe the methods of gathering the data, and the record of the data will be stored for ten years at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, the tables provided in this chapter provide an audit trail: a systematic record of the documentary evidence and source of these records. In order to achieve analytical generalisation the research should be deemed transferable through answering the question ‘Could the results of this qualitative research be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings?’ With reference to section 1.3.1., which describes case study methodology, it is noted that the rich, thick descriptions of both the context and the phenomenon allow the reader to make analytical generalisations.

Dependability is contingent upon answering these two questions: “Are the research questions clear and are the features of the study design congruent with them? Have things been done with reasonable care?” (Riege, 2003, p. 82). This chapter seeks to explain how the research questions led to a particular research design, and how the chosen research design allowed for these exploratory questions to be answered. It is hoped that the descriptions of how each method was applied demonstrates due care taken. Dependability is further achieved through: member checks or validation by respondents; debriefing by peers; triangulation; prolonged engagement in the field; persistent observations; and consideration given to researcher bias (my worldview, assumptions and theoretical orientation). Participants identified in this research (Nexus programme managers) were invited to read Chapters 6 to 8 before the thesis was finalised. Triangulation happened in multiple ways: methods used to collect data varied; many and different sources of data; and participants interviewed were diverse in terms of gender, race, and time of participation in the programme. In section 4.8 I outline my positionality with respect to this research.

As regards document veracity, Bowen (2009, p. 33) suggests that ensuring that the “content of the documents [have] authenticity, credibility, accuracy, and representativeness” is a means of ensuring quality. For each of these documents, sourced from the Nexus Shared Folder, the original purpose of the document is what ensures its authenticity and accuracy. These are records used by the people managing Nexus for the purposes of refining the programme, as in the case of the evaluations, previous focus groups or feedback received in assignments;

for planning, as in the case of working group documents, schedules and programmes; for teaching, as in the case of the presentations, speaker biographies, readings and references. Representativeness has been ensured by taking documents over a range of years. Credibility derives from the fact that the documents and records exist independent of this research.

Cohen et al. (2007, p. 149) go on to say that

> Qualitative research strives to record multiple interpretations of, intentions in and meanings given to situations and events … in qualitative methodologies measures of reliability include fidelity to real life, context and situation. These present as specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response, and meaningfulness to the respondents.

Whilst qualitative research can never be value-free (it does rely, after all, on an interpretation, sometimes of other interpretations) throughout the study it is important to acknowledge that the value of the truth in any research lies in its confirmability, trustworthiness, dependability, transferability and credibility.

4.8 Ethical considerations

"The burden of producing a study that has been conducted and disseminated in an ethical manner lies with the individual investigator" (Merriam, 1998, p. 219), which means that the researcher needs to be ever conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 51) define ethics as that which is good or bad, right or wrong and research ethics as aligning research purposes, reporting and outcomes with ethical principles and practices. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 527) argue that accountability is the most important guiding principle for the relationship between the scientific community and the rest of society. Rule and John (2011) link the issue of conducting ethical research with that of ensuring quality of research. It is therefore of critical importance to ensure that sound research is underpinned by ongoing consideration of, and adherence to, ethical practice.

Merriam (1998, p. 42) makes the point that in qualitative case studies "the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. … The investigator is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort." Furthermore she asserts that "both the readers of case studies and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can affect the final product" (Merriam, 1998, p. 142). In order to maximise ethical research, institutions of higher learning have research ethics committees who are able to assess any ethical issues whilst studying human beings. Research ethics committees ensure the rights and interests of all human subjects are protected in the plans for research. See

Appendix 1 for a copy of the research ethics certificate. In particular the rights and interests of minors, those from vulnerable groups, disabled people, refugees, people with low levels of education and prisoners are identified as specifically in need of protection (Rule & John, 2011, p. 113). In this research, the research questions are not contentious and the participants in the study do not fall into any vulnerable group as described by Rule and John.

Rule and John summarise research ethic requirements as ensuring autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence. Table 11 indicates how this research takes these requirements into consideration:

Table 11 *Research ethics throughout study*

Research ethics requirements	Prescribed actions	Actions taken
Autonomy	Permission from gatekeepers	Contacted director of programme to request permission (See Appendix 1).
	Informed consent from participants	Told participants of intent of research and that they need not agree to be interviewed or sign form (See Appendix 2).
	Ensure participant privacy, anonymity and confidentiality	Participants in study were assigned pseudonyms. Reporting does not identify participants. Permission granted by Nexus programme management to identify each person because they are significant people in the case of Nexus.
	No deception	Open and honest about what research was exploring.
Non-maleficence	Ensure no harm comes to participants or organisation	In the event of becoming aware of possible facts that could result in damage to be discussed with supervisor and reported to Dean of school.
Beneficence	Feedback	All participants in this research were invited to attend a presentation of the findings.
	Follow up	The thesis and journal article disseminated to research director of institution.

4.9 The researcher's positionality

I started working at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) in 2003, in the third year that GIBS was established as the University of Pretoria's business school situated in Johannesburg. The Dialogue Circle was established as a section of GIBS in 2002, with Nexus running for its first year. The purpose of the Dialogue Circle was to create opportunities for leaders from different social and economic collectives to meet to openly discuss matters that they might not otherwise have opportunities to do so. Nexus was one of the first programmes

designed in the Dialogue Circle. The Dialogue Circle was later re-named as the Centre for Leadership and Dialogue.

Some five years later, in 2008, I was part of the programme management in Dialogue Circle with oversight of the design and delivery of Nexus, amongst other programmes. I held this position for 18 months before leaving GIBS to work on mathematics teacher development programmes. In the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), South Africa was placed last in pupil achievements in Mathematics, and in 2015 was in second last place Mullis, Martin, Foy, and Hooper (2015). In part, one of the reasons for looking for ways to get involved in mathematics education again was because of my exposure to Nexus participants who were also seeking the means to become more meaningfully involved in response to the country's needs. In November 2012 I was again employed in a part-time role at GIBS, this time in the doctoral programme office. I continued my involvement in mathematics education in a part-time capacity.

In 2008 I had also begun the coursework for my M.Ed. during which time I proposed that I study Nexus as a site of adult learning. For various reasons this study was never started, but the questions around how and what adults learn in Nexus remained with me.

Whilst I hold an insider position with respect to my historical involvement with the programme, there have been several iterative re-workings of programme design and delivery. There have been nuanced shifts in the pedagogy, which allowed me to view the programme afresh when collecting data.

I am a 60 year old white woman who grew up in apartheid South Africa in a conservative environment until my first year in 1976 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). There I witnessed first-hand the outworking of student protests in response to the Soweto uprising, although I did not participate in any protest action. However, my student years proved to be the start of an incremental disorienting dilemma, what Mezirow holds is a transformative learning experience. After completing university I moved with my husband to a conservative rural area where I became aware that my new worldview was not shared with those with whom I worked. During my undergraduate years I came to realise that the guiding principles of apartheid could be questioned, a view that was not acceptable to my work colleagues.

When I was in my early 30s, we returned to Johannesburg, and into a time of greater political turbulence, during the end days of apartheid. At the start of my 40s I left teaching and began to work at GIBS, some eight years into South Africa's new democracy. At no other time in my life had I been as exposed to having to form collegial relationships with people of other races as during my time at GIBS. In addition, meeting people through the various Dialogue Circle

programmes also exposed me in different ways to other races, and to a realisation that I did not know my fellow South Africans, a realisation shared by many Nexus participants.

In conclusion, the insider position I held in Nexus caused a subtle but certain response in me to deal with a situation that I found unacceptable, that of the poor standard of mathematics teaching in South Africa. My personal experience is that my transformative learning experience had a permanent effect on my worldview and in how I respond to some of the deep needs in our society.

4.10 Limitations of research

Despite Plummer's (2001) view that sampling for life stories is the strategy employed by a researcher who does not have access to large amounts of data, the data collected for analysis in this study would have been bolstered by a life story of someone who did not find learning on Nexus at all useful. Whilst two of the life story respondents did report an initial scepticism with Nexus, at the time of interviewing them, both reported now understanding more of what they did learn and benefitted from in Nexus.

In addition, given that the institution has policies in place that prevented me from directly accessing past participants, it meant that this access was through gatekeepers mandated to contact former programme participants. For the most part those who responded to the invitation to either take part in the focus group or life story interviews had a relationship with the programme managers. In addition, two people who responded to the invitation to participate in the focus group discussions moved away from Johannesburg and were then unable to attend. This highlighted for me that all participants in this study were based in Johannesburg and so I was not able to interview anyone from a smaller town or in the rural districts.

The data could also have been strengthened by interviewing HR personnel in various organisations who had recommended that their employees attend Nexus. In these interviews respondents would be probed about their perceptions of how participation on Nexus had impacted the people who had attended the programme.

All ethical research carries the possibility of both researcher and informant bias. In several instances, study participants used the phrase 'adult learning' perhaps because they had just signed an informed consent document in which the title of this thesis was recorded. It served as a signal to me that some study participants were acutely aware that their words were being interpreted in a particular way, and that they would like to offer help to the researcher in their presence.

This research explored, amongst others, the role of relationships in learning on Nexus. In South Africa the nature of relationships between different races and cultures can be often informed by our apartheid past. As a White woman who grew up under apartheid with the benefits and privileges granted to my race group, the possibility is there that in interviewing people from other races I have missed the nuances of their lived experiences. In addition, some study participants may not have granted me full trust. It was important during the focus group discussions and interviews to remain curious and to listen deeply to the words of the study participants so that I could probe my own understanding of what was being told to me. The chapters which report and theorise findings were shared with research participants to ascertain any shortcomings in interpretations of their expressions.

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the rationale for why a qualitative approach in the interpretivist paradigm was used. I outlined my reasons for selecting a case study method with life stories, focus groups and varied documents as the means of collecting data that could provide rich and thick descriptions. Data collection and analysis was explained, as well as how measures for ensuring quality were taken. Ethical considerations for this research were also discussed.

In the next chapter I provide the case description, drawing heavily on the voices and reflections of key protagonists in Nexus.

Chapter 5: Nexus in the words of its originator, programme managers and participants

In this chapter I provide a thick and detailed description of what Nexus is, primarily using the words of the conceptualiser of Nexus, participants and programme managers. I have deliberately told the Nexus story in the words of its key protagonists and thus employ long quotations in this chapter to provide a thick, detailed sense of the Nexus experience. My detailed observations of certain events are also noted in this chapter. The chapter is structured around the purpose, programme, pedagogy and participants of Nexus. In the next chapter, Chapter 6, I discuss how Nexus participants reported the nature of learning on this programme, and in Chapter 7 the nature of learning and its impact is theorised. Chapter 8 theorises learning about leadership. Whilst the present chapter foregrounds a description of the Nexus programme, there may be references made in the supporting quotes to the nature of learning and its impact.

This leadership programme began in the early years of this century but its origins can be found in the tumult of the end years under apartheid in the late 1980s. The founding director of the business school, Professor Nick Binedell, saw a need for emerging leaders in the new democratic order to embark on a journey of understanding self and country-context. In the introductory part of this chapter the origins of Nexus and the link to the purpose of this type of leadership programme are explained. Next I discuss what the programme entails and provide thick descriptions of aspects of the programme. This is followed by accounts of the predominantly reflective and dialogic pedagogy of Nexus.

In the final section the focus falls on the Nexus participants. I first provide an overview of the demographic composition of Nexus since its inception in 2002. The chapter concludes with the programme managers and participants' words describing their curiosity about their experiences on Nexus and, indeed, how to better explain what Nexus is.

Table 12 *Summary of study participants whose responses are included in this chapter*

GIBS	
Names (Real names used with permission)	Role
Professor Nick Binedell	Founding Director of GIBS and conceptualiser of Nexus
Jadey Bosman	Programme co-ordinator (2014–2016) Programme manager (2016–2017)
Carmelita Davey	Programme co-ordinator (2009 – 2012) Programme manager (2012 – 2016) Senior programme manager (2016 – 2017)
Leon Mdiya	Nexus I participant (2002 – 2004) Programme manager (2004 – 2007) Consultant for Nexus Experiential Learning Journeys
Carrie Pratt	Consultant to GIBS Nexus programme since 2012 Lead facilitator (2013 – 2017)

NEXUS PARTICIPANTS (Anonymised names)			
GROUP RESPONSES		INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES	
Working group: Boss Henry Jann Laurie Ngao Niel Pravin Tebang	CURRENT NEXUS PARTICIPANTS	Life story interviews: Avinash * Ian Lawrence Lexie * Luleka * Yadhina *Focus group participants	PAST NEXUS PARTICIPANTS
Focus group discussions: Avinash (FGD1) Buyani (FGD1) Pierre (FGD1) Tebatso (FGD1) Leazal (FGD2) Mandla (FGD2) Sammy-Jane (FGD2) Ajman (FGD3) Lerushka (FGD3) Lexie (FGD3) Luleka (FGD3) Joe (FGD3)	PAST NEXUS PARTICIPANTS	Assignments (anonymised) Programme evaluations (anonymised)	CURRENT NEXUS PARTICIPANTS

Note: This table is provided here in order to make for easier reading in the chapter

The case of Nexus is now explained through the words of those involved in managing the programme, or who have participated as learners in Nexus. Reflections from my observations of a working group and experiential learning day also form part of building this case.

5.1 Purpose

The leadership programme, Nexus, was conceptualised and initiated in the early 2000s. In the words of Nick Binedell which follow, the roots of the programme lay in his personal experience of making sense of self and socio-economic-political context of the country through reflection and dialogue.

> In the mid-1980s, when the country was in turmoil, a friend of mine who was an accountant was appointed as the CEO of a division of Barlow Rand as it was at the time.
>
> We had a few celebratory beers and I asked him how on earth an accountant could deal with the human relations issues related to being a CEO!!
>
> We decided to start a discussion group and three of us who were all close friends agreed we would each find two others that weren't known to each other so as to start a new conversation and begin to meet. The group grew to eventually about 15 people and we met once a month for some 23 years!
>
> The purpose was to have an informal discussion about our work, the country and the economy.
>
> For the first year or so, each of us hosted an evening and spent half the evening sharing the story of our lives and the other half of the evening talking about our future with the group members providing feedback. That lasted for just over a year. After that we invited a few prominent CEOs and others including those involved in political life to engage with us and we made the trip to Zimbabwe and also away to the bush for a weekend which brought the group together in a powerful way.
>
> There were a number of prominent members to the group including Gail Kelly who later went on to run Westpac, one of the largest banks in Australia, and Murphy Morobe, Wendy Luhabe, Phillip Baum from Anglo and others.

> When GIBS was started I was hosting this group at the school for a dinner and a conversation took place between two members of the group about the leadership of Thabo Mbeki.
>
> Murphy Morobe and I then met at the end of the dinner because it had been so heated and also uninformed.
>
> The next day, coming back to GIBS, I realized (sic) that although our generation was very stuck in the conversation it would be useful for the next generation to ensure that they build the right kind of relationships and understanding with each other. That's how NEXUS was formed. We initiated a programme aimed at 28 – 32 years olds of hi-potential (sic) in business and civil society to meet. Although the programme has at times taken a different shape than the original discussion group, it has been of significant value and I think can continue to be.
>
> The discussion group I led had no name, no constitution and very few rules. We started at 6 pm promptly and finished by 9 pm. We didn't serve alcohol, we normally had a topic. If you didn't come for 3 meetings, we stopped inviting you! It was a wonderful experience and most of the members believe a lot of their ideas and reflections came from this informal, private and intimate discussion. (Personal email communication, 20 June 2017)

From the description provided by Binedell of the origination and development of Nexus, there is remarkable longevity in the issues of the late 1980s in South Africa. Carrie, the lead Nexus facilitator, reflected on the different shaping of Nexus over time, and her words echo those of Binedell's of the impact of country context on its people and the need for discussions between diverse groups of people in order to build relationships based on trust:

> One of the pillars of Nexus, and I think it's one of the beauties of working groups, is one - at the beginning of Nexus the beauty of the working groups [was that] you rarely had people from different racial groups in same room speaking honestly together…at the beginning I don't have a sense that people really got the principles of dialogue. I know that Nexus was desperately needed at the time that it started and it was desperately needed because really people didn't know each other, they didn't talk to each other, everyone was terribly fearful and all of that. I feel like it's just as, if not more, desperately needed now 'cause I think we're at a stage where we're as

> divided and as disconnected for different reasons, but I don't see us pulling together as society. I see us fracturing and there's a lot of social protest, there's a lot of bewilderment around what that's all about, and I feel like programmes like Nexus are even more needed, if that's possible, than they were when they were started because we haven't found each other in these 20 years. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

It is perhaps in the informal and intimate nature of this type of learning that some of the difficulty in articulating what the purpose of this leadership programme is lie. Fracture and hurt are markers of South African society today and it is a bold claim to make that this leadership programme helps leaders to understand what it is that they hold as 'truth' when these 'truths' are held up under the scrutiny of multiple and diverse points of view.

In the next section, using the reflections of the programme managers, Nexus participants, and my observations of certain events the intended and enacted structure of the Nexus programme is discussed.

5.2 Programme

Leon Mdiya was a participant in Nexus 1 and three years later was part of the programme management team responsible for Nexus, a role he played for three years. Since then Leon has run his own consultancy and is contracted by Nexus to develop and manage the experiential learning journeys. The vignette offered below by Leon, who was reflecting about the means by which Nexus gets its participants to make big shifts in their understanding, notes the interplay between the overarching programme structure and the pedagogy of the programme.

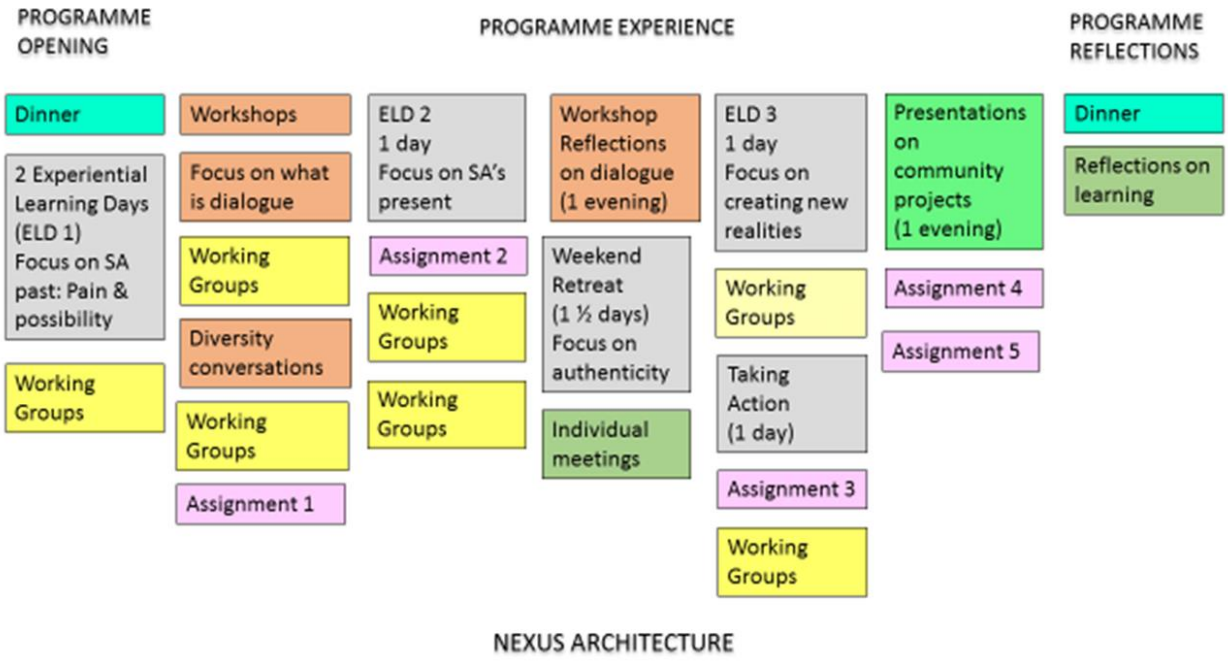
> Ja, so I will mention a few because I think it is a combination, it is not one thing, but I think it is a combination of these things: one is the structure of the programme, that you are dealing with history and that is very experiential in its approach, there is no theory at all. And I think it helps because you can't come to Nexus and hope just because you are clever you are going to pass. You need to, and you can't fake it, you know you come as you are: and if you are racist that will come out; if you are whatever, that will come out. Because you will be challenged by the ELDs we put together, you will be challenged by the speakers we bring to the programme, you will be challenged by your own peers in this thing. And not necessarily directly, but because of their experiences. So when somebody says "This is who I am,

> this is whatever" it challenges how you look at them because perhaps when you came in you thought, "Ah Viv had it all" – right? One, because I look at her and she is White; clearly based on our history she is supposed to have all her life organised, until you listen to Viv's story, and then you realised that, "Shoo, she has maybe had a harder life than I as a Black person growing up." So that for me, those are some of the little things that happened without people thinking about it.
>
> But when you are exposed to those kind of experiences and then you go to the museums … [we] put together, and not [just] any museum … you can't but help but think about history differently, think about life differently, think about your role in this space called South Africa differently. How your life pans out over the years, nobody can – even yourself – you can't determine it until the end; because most people come and are like, "You know I never kind of understood what this [Nexus] programme was all about until now, I am about to graduate and now I realise this is what it has done for me."
>
> Because also we give you enough time, the programme gives you enough time to introspect, to review, to reflect on your life. Whereas, if you think about it, most normal or conventional programmes, they don't have that space of reflection. And I think that is perhaps where our high moments come in like, "Wow, I didn't realise", or "I like this or I don't like that'" or "This is who I am" – because it makes you open yourself up a little bit, see things about yourself that you didn't realise. It is, like I say, a combination of all the elements of the programme put together, that produce that kind of realisation for me. You meet people that you would not under normal circumstances engage with. That on its own has I think an effect of challenging how you look at life. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

Leon's point about the combination of parts and various approaches is pertinent here. In explaining the pedagogy of Nexus in the next section I will recount the powerful story of Nexus co-ordinator Jadey about being part of an ELD but not having the opportunity to debrief, nor reflect through writing an assignment, nor to participate in a working group dialogue session. A second story of Lawrence, a Nexus participant, recounts how he missed the opening seminar and how not participating in the first ELD impacted the process of his learning on Nexus. These two stories illustrate how participation in both the experience of an ELD and reflection through dialogue are crucial to understanding of self and self in context.

The Nexus programme begins in April and ends in October each year. Whilst elements of the programme are reworked in response to feedback from participants and reflection by the programme management team about achieving certain learning outcomes, Nexus follows the same basic architecture each year. Figure 5 provides a schematic of the entire programme, and this is followed by explanations, supported by the voices of research participants, of their understanding of different elements of the programme.

As can be seen from Figure 6, the programme experience comprises several different elements. These elements will be explained further, some in more detail than others. The explanations draw in part from my observations of certain events, some from Nexus participants' reporting, and some from the various documents analysed in this research.



Key	
	Experiential learning days and seminars
	Group dialogue sessions
	Community learning Group dialogue
	Theory and practice of dialogue
	Reflections on learning
	Individual assignments
	Group presentations
	Dinner

Figure 6. Schematic of Nexus programme

5.2.1 Experiential learning days

Carrie, in reference to a diagram found in the Nexus guidebook, (Nexus, 2017, p. 6) (see Figure 7), explains how experiential learning days are planned for the year's programme:

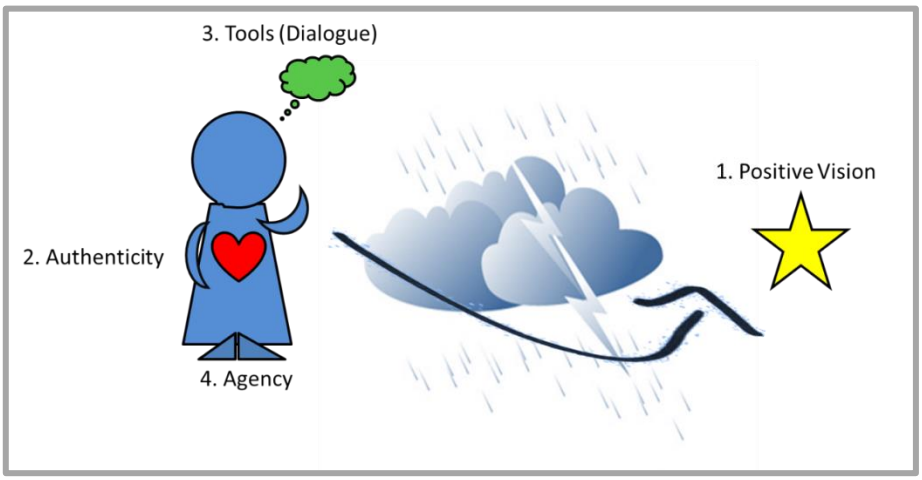


Figure 7. What is needed to lead beyond boundaries (Nexus, 2017, p. 6)

> There's a person and then there's a storm and then there's purpose, agency, authenticity and dialogue and so we're always saying all of our days are designed to look at these things but with a different emphasis. So at the beginning we really work on dialogue, how do you do it, how do you understand it, so that people can work with it through the year and try and master it.
>
> Over the past two years we realised that we needed to be more explicit about how each day fits into Nexus with people. So I do a 5 minutes, not even, at beginning of every single day that we're together saying, "Here's what we're doing today and here's how it fits into Nexus." So I bring up this picture and I say, "Here's how what we're doing fits with what we're trying to - so we're going to focus mainly on dialogue, or we're going to really be looking - when we go out and meet people we're going to be looking at agency and purpose. That's made a huge difference to people's ability to see the threads. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

On 10th August 2016, as part of my data collection process, I observed the third experiential learning day (ELD) of the 2016 Nexus programme. On the programme published for that day it was named "ELD 3. Into the Arena: creating new realities". The full day event began with a

breakfast at 08h00 in the restaurant on campus. The room was set up with several round tables at which Nexus participants were eating, and talking animatedly. Breakfast was served from a buffet and throughout the first 45 minutes participants kept arriving. A screen and data projector was also part of the set up. I joined one of the tables and part of the conversation I observed was a curiosity about what would happen in the day, and where they would be visiting.

Carrie opened the day formally, and introduced me to the group. I offered a brief explanation about my research interests and requested permission to make observations and collect data. An informed consent document was distributed amongst the participants for their signatures. Respondents were told and could read on the informed consent statement that there was no obligation to participate in this research.

Carrie then explained that this ELD was part of a progression from the first two experiential learning days. ELD 1 was a journey into the past with visits on that day to Liliesleaf (a heritage site in Johannesburg opened in 2008 that recognises the role played by, amongst many others, Nelson Mandela in achieving political liberation in South Africa http://www.liliesleaf.co.za/), the Voortrekker Monument (a monument in Pretoria opened in 1949 to commemorate the European pioneers of the mid-1800s http://www.vtm.org.za/), and Constitution Hill, often referred to as Con Hill (the site of the highest court in the land and a heritage site that tells the story of the journey to democracy https://www.constitutionhill.org.za/). The second ELD was an exploration of our present reality with a visit to the inner city in Johannesburg. The emphasis of the second ELD was on deepening an understanding of our present day South Africa.

The focus of the third ELD, the day that I observed, was to bring the future to life now, and this was to be explored by visiting people and places to see where this is exemplified. Nexus participants were invited to meet with people who have a sense of agency and who demonstrate this through their vision and purpose. A video clip was then shown of John Ahkwari's completion of the marathon at the Olympics in Mexico City in 1968 (for example, see Sports TUBE, 2017, Oct 19). John Ahkwari suffered injury whilst competing in the marathon and, despite this, completed the race long after it was thought all competitors had completed running. Carrie's guidance to the Nexus participants was to invite stories from the people they were going to meet and to not focus on the stumbles in the stories they would hear.

Leon then explained to the group the logistics of the day. It was noteworthy that the cohort still had no idea of where they would be going, and that it was at this moment when the details were divulged. Leon asked that the principles of dialogue, explained later in section 5.3.3

should be practiced: to listen, suspend judgement and offer respect, but not to 'give voice'. He told the group that they would meet people dear to him, ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Nexus participants were warned against seeing and hearing and then just returning to their businesses as usual and retreating into their bubbles after the day.

The cohort was divided into three groups: one group would travel to visit people in Soweto who were dealing with challenges in education, a second group to Alexandra Township to meet with people supporting initiatives for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and a third group to Diepsloot Township to meet with entrepreneurs. All three visits were to townships near the campus.

Townships in South Africa are the "legacy of the apartheid government which systematically excluded populations from economic opportunities, as well as spatially confining activity and place of residence based on race" (Makanga, Schuurman, & Randall, 2017, p. 1257) as is the case in Soweto and Alexandra. But more recently developed townships form as the result of the settlement of people from outside cities or from other countries. These informal settlements may be unplanned and unauthorised, as in the case of Diepsloot. In some townships life is noteworthy for poor living conditions: there is overcrowding; basic infrastructure is rundown, not maintained or non-existent; there are high levels of extended unemployment; housing is non-compliant with both planning and building regulations; there are very high levels of poverty, violence, alcohol and drug use; and a high prevalence of illnesses such as TB, HIV and AIDS in these communities (Atujuna et al., 2018; du Toit, De Witte, Rothmann, & Van den Broeck, 2018; Makanga et al., 2017). Townships, in short, powerfully signal how the ongoing apartheid spatial divides continue in contemporary South Africa.

I was assigned to the group that was to visit Diepsloot. The division of the Nexus cohort was not according to the working groups divisions, and our group had nine Nexus participants and myself. The group was led by Carol, a guide from Diepsloot, and Leon also accompanied our group.

The visits were to a medical centre, Qualihealth (http://www.qualihealth.co.za/), situated on the outskirts of Diepsloot (literally 'deep ditch' because of the river course running through the settlement), a supermarket, a walk through the markets run by Somali and Pakistani expatriates, a visit to a Jazz Club which also hosted a stokvel (a South African phenomenon of an informally constituted savings or investment club in which members pay instalments in order to later withdraw a lump sum), a visit to a park that had been built during the 2010 World Cup hosted by South Africa, and finally visits to clothes designers whose shops were closed because they had been called to meetings. Travel to Diepsloot was in a 10-seater Quantum

so the whole group travelled together. In South Africa this form of transport is referred to as a taxi. Diepsloot was the furthest of the three townships visited by Nexus participants on that day, some 40 kilometres north of GIBS.

The most notable event for me was that upon entering Diepsloot our taxi driver was confronted by a group of vociferous local community members. Because I do not speak any African language I was not able to follow the debate. One of the Nexus participants told me that the local group was upset because no unauthorised taxis were permitted to come into Diepsloot. The taxi was then impounded by the local community group and we were not allowed back in the vehicle. A compromise was then reached and we walked from one part of Diepsloot over the wetland and river to the other side of the township. There roads are unsurfaced, and mostly intended for pedestrian traffic. There are no streetlights and, in places, running water and garbage made it difficult to walk. Once we had arrived at our destination our new transport became apparent: we were to climb into one of three cars provided by local community members to be driven back to the taxi. The first and second cars were full and so was the third. As I stood outside the vehicle I was told that there was plenty of space in any one of the cars. In a jocular fashion I was reminded that my whiteness which sees space between people as a requirement when travelling had been overtaken by a greater need which was to be transported.

Such moments remain in my understanding today: the contrast between my experience of travel and that of many others who use public transport daily; the mystery of how it felt trustworthy enough to climb into a stranger's car to travel to an unspecified place; the laughter and camaraderie that accompanied explanations to me from those more familiar with these practices; the wonder that a body of people with no legislated authority were able to impound our vehicle; the calmness with which the Nexus facilitators and guide managed the sudden shift in plans; the generosity shown by participants in continually translating the idioms and language used into English and the interpretations of various practices observed.

We returned from Diepsloot by 16h20 and thereafter followed a debriefing in plenary for an hour and a half. Each group was asked to feedback to the cohort, which proved to open further nuances in meaning. My field notes reflect how the power of stories pulled through when participants were giving their feedback, and also how moments in the day reminded them of childhood memories and values. In this session someone mentioned how wonderful it was to have a 'seven colours' lunch again, something she treasured from her family home. This lead to a lively discussion about what a 'seven colours' lunch is, and why it is so important. The conversation stood out for me because the stories of such a meal represented family celebrations and connection which happened on a weekly basis. The conversation was

marked by both curiosity and joy. On my journey back home it struck me that such a day of learning was enjoyable, exhilarating and tiring, but mostly I was aware of the kindness and concern of the group. I was often asked if I was getting what I wanted. I did and more.

5.2.2 Working groups

"You will meet monthly to engage in dialogue with a small and consistent group of your peers. This group is called your Working Group" (Nexus, 2017, p. 4). Working groups are remarkable for being self-facilitated even though the matters being discussed are embedded in division, hurt and anger. Nexus is about trusting the process of dialogue but also trusting the participants to work with contentious and potentially divisive matters. The purpose of dialogue is to deepen understanding of the matter being discussed and not to find solutions. Because the driver of the working groups is to understand, this supplants the need to be right and allows robust discussion. Working groups typically take place after an event, as explained by Jadey:

> So in terms [of] our structures it's usually an event, whether it's our experiential learning day, whether it's a seminar or whatever, and then after that we have what we call working groups which is then the dialogue session. So the reason we have it a week apart from each other is that you have your experience, you reflect and make meaning of that experience, then you come and engage in a dialogue about that experience and what it meant for you or how you in your reflection have interpreted it and then to get these different voices to either challenge or accept your perception or help you understand it better so you've got … and that's why it's such a big part that the group is diverse as possible in terms of sector, in terms of background, in terms of gender, race, etc. so, so it's really just like feeding off the idea that, like more learning happens from, from different views. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

In working groups the participants enter a reflective phase of learning, and open themselves to hearing the views of other participants. It is in this opening up to listening to others that learning is deepened, in the words of Jadey.

In reflections by Nexus participants there are many references to being forced to confront or think about issues differently. In Carrie's explanation we see how some of this forcing happens:

> [Working groups have] always been in the Nexus format, right? … But then also we've really organised it so that people are reflecting at the end of each session on how well they are doing dialogue. So the beauty of this is and the first three sessions they have a - they call it a "dialogue guide" so they have a Leon, or a Tozi, or a Quinton or a Rashika who come in and sit with them but don't facilitate [the dialogue]. Right? They witness, they observe and then they facilitate 20 minutes at the end saying, "Ok, so where didn't you take a risk? What could you have done to deepen your practice of dialogue? What was the question you sat with and you didn't ask? What was the time inside that I saw you going like this [gestures] at some point? What was happening for you?" Right? So they get people to think about how as a group do we take bigger risks, do we expose our vulnerabilities, do we ask the questions that make us, you know, kind of choke. And how do we engage in this? So the first three sessions have that guide and then they're on their own (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015).

Part of my data gathering was on the closing day of the Nexus programme for 2015. Data from a working group were collected and I now describe this. The day's programme began at 14h30 in a flat-floor classroom with the whole cohort meeting in a plenary session. Nexus participants were seated in their working groups, and observations from my field notes say "General conversation, some on phones. Participant hugs Carrie. Well-dressed professionals". After introducing me to the group, Carrie outlined the programme for the day but first dealt with a matter outstanding from the previous time of meeting. At the previous Nexus event a bridge had collapsed across a major arterial road thus preventing one of the groups from giving feedback from their community learning project. At this final meeting for the year this group was given the opportunity to do this. They reported that in their community learning project they wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the born-frees (this is the generation of people born after the first democratic elections in 1994 who ostensibly have had no exposure to apartheid) and they described their learning project. Their planned action arising from the project was to create a career day to help born-frees to understand more about choices they can make.

Then followed the working group session, and the so-named Green working group willingly invited me to join their session. The working groups were allocated to various rooms on campus. The room used by the Green group was the same venue where all focus group discussions for this research took place. No wonder one of the focus group participants commented: "It felt like Nexus for a moment, as people were talking. Thanks, it was an

opportunity for us to reflect back on the experiences and bring those closer to our prefrontal lobe, it was a good experience to interact again" (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

At the beginning of the session six people were present with a further two joining much later. The room contained a large table with a screen and PC at one end. The participants seated themselves around the other end of the table and there was general conversation and some laughter. Their agenda had four items:

- A check-in in which each person had to give two words, one describing how they felt about Nexus on the first day, and the second describing how they now felt about Nexus
- PechaKucha (a presentation format that promotes conciseness and a quick-pace, thus allowing several participants to make their presentation) of 30 minutes per member, seven slides per presentation. In this presentation Nexus participants were asked to reflect on their year in Nexus
- A dialogue session with the aim of dealing with unspoken matters and, paraphrasing Carrie, "conversations you feel that should have been had, what has not been gotten to"
- A close-out session in which participants could say what they felt still needed to be said.

After obtaining the necessary permissions, the entire session was recorded and transcribed and will be reported on in greater detail in the next chapters. The invitation for Nexus participants to reflect on what the Nexus experience had meant to them provided rich data for this study.

5.2.3 Weekend retreat

"Retreat: Our off-campus retreat is designed to support the development of greater self-awareness and deepen your understanding of authenticity and authentic leadership" (Nexus, 2017, p. 4). The retreat takes place midway in the programme and entails participants staying over at a venue situated outside of the urban area of Johannesburg.

> Authenticity comes in really around the weekend away - we really do deep work on what does it mean to make yourself vulnerable, you know, how do you find your leadership story in your own life story, those kind of things. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Some of the activities and what participants learned from them are mentioned in the following quotes:

> I remember, I don't know if you guys did this, on our weekend retreat, I forget the name of the game, but everyone stands in a line and then you get asked a question – have you ever been without electricity, take ten steps back, have you ever not had anything to eat, and [have] you been to an Ivy League

school, have you - and the room starts breaking apart but some people you don't necessarily expect to be standing next to you because you don't realise that their experience was maybe very similar to you even though they are a different race or whatever the case may be, so it breaks down those kinds of barriers to our stereotypes. Our pain as well, being there, I can do this but I don't have that - I don't know the right people or I don't - whatever, that was a very powerful, I am not sure if you can call it a game, it was a very powerful exercise that we did (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

It was Saturday night, weekend away and you eat and we had been having all of these things and then we have supper together, all relaxed ...We had the, that exercise Leazal was talking about, on the line. We do … Biodanza, the whole dancing, dancing as meditation thing, we went on sound journey, ah, I loved the sound journey [laughs]. … so a whole bunch of things, we had an exercise on masks that you wear, how many masks do you have, so you all get these paper plates and you draw all your masks and it's so interesting, who has like ten masks, and who confesses to ten masks, a very intricate day of just really deep reflection. Then we also had projects that we had to do so there was a lot of things that happened on that Saturday. … Anyway, so then in the evening we have supper, it's all nice, it is like – ok we are going to share, and then the sharing session is supposed to be basically an hour and a half, 90 minutes maximum and …we all sit down in a nice little corner with the wine overflowing from the heavens and we just have a chat and it turned into one of the most profound experiences really of my life, because people really took to it. Afterwards we were like – Carrie was saying "1 minute" and we are like, "Carrie we don't care" (laughter). We were up probably until maybe 11, I think ours was maybe three and a half almost four hours of really people being deeply – that's the thing, that was the brief – be seen, have the courage to be seen. You know when you are like – you preparing for it – and you're just like "Ok, what am I going to say that's - you know"? I've got these three topics that I could - And as that conversation started, I will never forget who spoke first – I know exactly, I can see her face, and she just went for it, like boom, deep in the bottom and recounted the most harrowing story of her father like abusing her mother, and it was just over from then on, it was just over because it is so compelling and it's so vulnerable and you can't help but respond to it, and it's just

> "Whoo, whoo, whoo, people" – it just - you know I learnt in that moment that really the type of attention that you pay really changes, elevates the conversation. Because the conversation completely changed, a lot of us were actually talking about it afterwards, saying, "I had no intention of saying what I said, but because everybody was being so courageous and really digging, really, really digging that in the end you can't help but just bring them [your thoughts], like go and find them. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

5.2.4 Assignments

Assignments have no grades or marks awarded, but sometimes a resubmission is necessary if the requirements of the assignment have not been met. The resubmission may require that the participant reflect on their interpretation of one of the practices of dialogue, or even that the participant repeats the activity based on a new understanding of the purpose of the assignment.

> I instituted the assignments (they didn't used to have assignments) … the first two are very individual reflections and people write very personal, it's almost like a journal entry, kind of they're an assignment more than they're an academic assignment and I write back often more than they've written to me. So I take an hour on each assignment and that's my chance of saying "Where's, for example, the theory of dialogue for THIS person landing, and where is it that it's not really making sense? And where's it that they've got an idea that I don't think is a correct way … they've kind of misunderstood something I've said or that they've read" and that's my opportunity to engage individually with every single person on Nexus … And then their third assignment is one that they choose, so they say, you know the task is "What would deepen your learning most profoundly on Nexus?" and then I use that time [during the individual meetings] to discuss with them and to shape that, and then they go and do it. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

5.2.5 Individual meetings

In addition to getting feedback for Nexus participants in the form of written reflections on applying their learning in their personal circumstances, there is also opportunity for one-on-one dialogue between Carrie and participants. In this meeting the focus is on understanding of processes and meaning-making.

> The individual meetings [component] is just two years old. I think this is the second year, yeah, I did it first last year. That's been fantastic and so helpful for me because I know in the bigger group … ok the year before last I got more individual feedback. But in this group there's a lot of people that I don't [connect with beyond saying] "Hello" and they come in, or a brief conversation at tea time but I'm out there focused and so I'm not having long engagements individually with people so I don't always hear how things are landing, and that's been absolutely amazing to have that time with each person and to be able to discuss how they're experiencing Nexus. … I also have an individual meeting with everybody after the weekend away and I have, yeah, I come here for four days and see everybody to also talk about how the programme is landing, what are their questions. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

5.2.6 Conclusion on programme design

The following three paragraphs from the 2017 Nexus guidebook (p. 5) summarise the overarching programme design:

> Because the issues focused on in the Nexus programme are 'beyond the boundaries' of what has been solved before, there are no easy answers available to address them. For this reason, Nexus is not a programme that focuses on giving you technical solutions. Instead, we engage in a process of 'discovering together'. In that respect, the learning on Nexus is built from the ground up. We start with your personal experience, expose you to additional input, converse with practitioners and then reflect collectively on what is needed to create a more positive reality.
>
> This is what makes Nexus different from many other programmes. You are a participant and not a delegate. Your input matters. Your ideas shape the experience. You are responsible for your own learning, and for contributing to the learning of others.
>
> This bottom-up approach to learning can be unfamiliar and, sometimes, uncomfortable. It requires significant ownership on the part of the participants. Nexus is not a programme that you can show up to expecting to be a passive participant. It requires active involvement. What you put in is what you will take out.

Having given some understanding of the various components in the Nexus programme, or the planned curriculum, I now move onto discussing the learning strategies or pedagogy reported by programme managers and Nexus participants.

5.3 Pedagogy

The introduction to this section on the pedagogy of Nexus is illustrated via two stories. Jadey's story highlights learning through integrity of various processes and Lawrence's account shows how learning is carried throughout the entire programme.

Jadey, because of her dual role as co-ordinator responsible for logistical and learning support and as an involved participant in learning journeys, told how the lack of opportunity to self-reflect and to make sense through dialogue with other people who have been through the same experience on the ELDs caused her great distress in her own meaning-making. As a consequence of not having the opportunity to garner other perspectives she said that it "sits with you for days and days and days." Jadey was given advice by a Nexus participant to engage in activities that help with reflection because "that's where things come together." Jadey, a willing and interested participant, was excluded from a process of critical and collective reflection because of her role on Nexus, but interestingly she used alternate means for sense-making in speaking to her manager and to Carrie.

> So firstly I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is powerful, this is not fluffy stuff, this is - this keeps me up at night." This stuff we speak about, the situations we see and it was difficult for me because some of the emotions, some of the visits and the people you meet emotionally drain you and you just have no idea at that point. Obviously a large part of Nexus is the reflection process after and making sense of a visit, or a guest speaker and then when you're a novice and you don't even understand that that needs to happen for you to work through some of the stuff. It was quite difficult, so sometimes I'd be really emotional and at the same time I'd need to remain professional because it's "Are delegates feeling the same sort of thing?" and you'd need to sort of talk them through what, what just happened. … Oh, and just to speak a little bit, Viv, on how that affected me the first time I went. I, I, it was like most delegates, so it totally, I don't know, you are just so distraught after that, it just sits, it sits with you for days and days and days and you don't understand - is it something you need to do, is it - like how could this be happening and you know so freely and it's like, so it sits with you and you just don't know how to process it to the point that I, you know, when I came

> back I came to Phyllis "I can't - like why did we do this, like why would we put anybody through this?".
>
> In terms of programme design I think there's a lot to support it, so you've got your assignments that really embeds this learning, and you've got working group sessions where you - it's like debriefing again you know - sorry just to mention on the side is that I think that was missing for me in the first year, because I was a delegate but I didn't have all these other things supporting me through these experiences. I think there's a lot that supports delegates in terms of you know the programme design, and then – [Viv: That's very interesting. So not going through the working groups] Not really being present at the debrief either because when you're debriefing you're fetching your evaluation or you're doing this, you're not actually engaging in that debrief, that's why you go home and you can't sleep. No assignments 'cause I mean I would say to delegates, "'I feel like I'm a delegate and whatever"' and at the end at graduation one delegate said to me, "'Jadey, next year you're going to go through this again. Try to do the assignments as well because that's where things really come together."' (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015).

Lawrence's story highlights the integrity of programme. His account below shows how he did not engage in the learning process on Nexus to the point of sabotaging his own learning. He missed the first experiential learning day and thereafter played catch up in the programme. It was the sudden realisation that members of his class were in high-powered jobs and were willing to demonstrate their vulnerability during the working group that piqued his interest in their stories. He made a poignant comment, "and then we got to the end [of Nexus]. And I was heart sore."

> And so I went in and I was like, "Look, you said you [his manager] did this thing, you say it helps, they say it is non-academic, I don't know because I am not going to use it on my CV" … I thought, "So let me try this, it is very different." … I think, "Oh God, this is going to be a long year" and everybody is sitting up straight and they are taking themselves too seriously… and the intro didn't help "You are emerging leaders" – "No, I have emerged already, I am there, I am like toes in!" … Do you know how big a team I have?!! (laughs) I am not doing this [Nexus] because it is going to get me a promotion, this is just emotional rubbish, it doesn't matter! (laughs).

> So fast forward to the first class: I walk in late, because it didn't pop up in my diary. In fact I think I missed the first, first class, the first excursion when they went to Conhill. It didn't pop up in my diary. Jadey phones me, "Hi Lawrence, you are meant to be in class." "What class? It is not in my diary." "We sent you a schedule" … "Sorry, can I ask you to email it to [my PA], make sure, if it is not in my diary I am not doing it. I am in Durban, I am building systems - what is this Nexus thing?". So I get here and now everybody had met, right, they had been away [to] Conhill, so they kind of know who is who. Now I am here, this is a class, I have my laptop and I sit down and I arrive late and I take out my iPad and I am going through mails. And I hear stuff, and then we do activities and I am, "Oh God, again! … Why are we doing this, this is stupid!" So they are like immersed into this, they have been to the female section of the prison, they have seen where Mandela was kept hostage … and I haven't emotionally done a thing … but now like they are relating and they are all like all teary and stuff and I am like, "Forget this" … then we go to tea break and then conversations start, right? Because now guys are talking about their histories and I am like - I was on my phone the whole time, I was like I don't care. We get back, talk a little bit more and we get to the end of the day and I couldn't wait to get out of there, because emotionally it was like all this emotional stuff that I am like, "What? Why?" (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2015)

Jadey and Lawrence both made reference to the pedagogy used in Nexus, and how integral each part is to the entire learning experience. They highlighted in their reflections learning that emerges from experiential learning days, activities in small groups, dialogue in working groups, personal accounts of the lives of the participants and the people visited during experiential learning days, inputs from guest speakers, reflection through assignments, and that learning has an emotional and relational dimension. These aspects of learning are discussed in more depth in the next chapter which examines the nature of learning.

5.3.1 Principles informing learning design

The general approach is to provide provocative input through, for example, experiential learning days or seminars, and then in working groups to make sense and to build meaning, but it is the diversity of the group that gives multiple perspectives which provide opportunities for deepening learning.

> So in terms with our structures it's usually an event: whether it's our experiential learning day, whether you know it's a seminar or whatever and then after that we have what we call working groups which is then the dialogue session. So the reason we have it a week apart from each other is that you have your experience, you reflect and make meaning of that experience, then you come and engage in a dialogue about that experience and what it meant for you or how you in your reflection have interpreted it and then to get these different voices to either challenge or accept your perception or you know help you understand it better so you've got … and that's why it's such a big part that the group is diverse as possible in terms of sector, in terms of background, in terms of gender, race, etc. so, so it's really just like feeding off the idea that, like more learning happens from, from different views. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

Leon explained it succinctly as

> One) It is the structure of the programme and two) it is the conversations that people have in the working groups and then across the programme. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

With regard to focus on theory, ten references to readings (see Appendix 5) are provided in the Nexus guidebook. Participants are expected to read and reflect on all readings, "to revisit them throughout the programme, and to reference them where relevant in your assignments" (Nexus, 2017, p. 19). The readings are on dialogue, developing an attitude of inquiry through questions and discovery, and on being open to uncertainty or being wrong.

> Those are all readings I've set and I'm a huge reader and a big believer in theory but it's not how we do Nexus really. But for the people who want - so there's different people who come on Nexus and their needs and interests are different and there's always a group of people who like me want to understand what it links to in the theory. Right? So I set the readings to do that and there's a group of people, because we're majority corporate, who want to understand that in the business context so I consciously set the readings, kind of a lot from Harvard stuff and a lot from the old Center for Organisational Learning at MIT. You know it's that kind of subset - authentic leadership, those kind of things – but I, I consciously choose the readings to try and meet the needs of what I've come to realise is a particular subgroup

> of Nexus. A lot of people never read them but there are people who are hungry for that as well. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

The learning approach is designed to meet and stretch learning on Nexus through a range of options available to participants. Carrie noted that there is the real danger that participants might be so overwhelmed by the provocations to learning that they cease to participate in the programme, and that this makes it necessary to check in with how the information is being processed. It also highlights the riskiness of such an approach to learning, and the need for such learning to be scaffolded.

> I want Nexus to meet people where they are and I want it to stretch them profoundly but that's different for everybody. Where they need the stretch, what stretch it is – all of that is different. And so I'm trying to think always of "How can I have a range of things that meet the learning needs of different people?" So there are some people who love literature and so, for example, after every ELD that we do I give a list of resources for further exploration and that's a list of fiction, non-fiction, videos, TED talks - again a range of things that appeal to different kinds of people if they are interested in thinking more about the themes and issues that we've come up with, but it's just an invitation. I kind of figure out where do we need to go, what are people going to need to be comfortable enough to engage but also be comfortable enough to stretch themselves. So how do I make sure that they are not so overwhelmed that they just check out? How do I keep in touch enough with each person that I know kind of where they're at and how the information is landing? (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

For Leon, the stretch was in terms of time spent by participants on such a programme. He questioned if a year is long enough time to consolidate learning on Nexus:

> Because at the end of the year they are only now getting a sense of what the programme is about, and then also the appreciation of what the programme has done for them, and the following year would consolidate that learning, but ja, unfortunately there is no second year. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

What is permitted as stretching learning has its limits. Carrie notes that "every once in while I've wanted to do a fire walk [a barefoot walk over hot coals] and I was told that was not possible."

Carmelita talked about continual improvements to programme design in response to participant feedback:

> [What] helps with the feedback that you get from having those conversations over dinner or breakfast or - with the working groups we have dinner first so I try to stay for that so I can have the conversations with them. Getting [back to the point] on evaluation feedback, what we do, we have a reflection sheet that we give them after every event and on that reflection sheet they'll say what - we give it back to them at the end of the year so they can see the journey they have gone through so that also obviously [helps them] realise the changes they have gone through. So that also give us an idea of what's working, what's not working, where they are, is this something we need to change, and also from our side as management and coordinator: "Oh you know we have like logistically this was a little bit of much more of a problem or –" So then we sit and we make changes to the programme whether it's minor, whether it's big. We had this speaker who didn't work, so after sessions like that, I like to have conversations with people and say, "Oh how was that for you? How was the experience? What did you think?" and get that little bit of feedback which all help. So at the end of every year we'll sit, we'll go through every session: did this work, why did this not work, oh I got this feedback, I got that. So it's usually myself and Jadey and Carrie, the programme lead, and then we'll sit we'll have - and [the programme director] will come in and then we may have like a Leon who still is on our experiential [learning days design] to give a little feedback, but mostly it's just us that's sitting and then we go through the year and what worked and that's how we design, redesign the programme (Carmelita, Interview, Oct. 7, 2015)

This innovative and iterative approach to designing the learning programme has meant that the design is loosely held, and that the programme team is willing to acknowledge that some learning approaches are successful and others not so. "So we, yeah we just try things as they come up and some of them work and some don't" (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015).

5.3.2 When learning happens

The learning approach used on Nexus is not useful for all participants though. Carmelita described those who find it difficult to be open to learning from and through others. In these instances learning may not happen at all.

> Some people come in and they don't change and they still like 'Listen' and that's also the people that come to the working groups that don't really participate. And they come … I always tell people when we do the interviews in the beginning I said, "Come in with an open mind. If you going to come in that you don't want to learn, that you - not 'learn' but you, yeah you're just 'this my way and that's it' then this programme is not for you". … delegates who just don't get it. It's difficult because you want them to get it and you want to explain to them how it works and it is just if you don't want to you just not going to - it doesn't matter how you explain it to them you're just not going to [change]. (Carmelita, Interview, Oct. 7, 2015)

Carrie on the other hand noted that learning may happen only after the participant has left the programme, and as a consequence of applying what was learnt on the programme into their workplace.

> When that kind of shifts into embracing is different. And there's almost always some people who even towards the end of the year are still saying, "You know you're really nice but I haven't got a clue what we're doing or how this relates to my work." I mean I had one person two years ago from KPMG who, [in] his third assignment was "I'm trying to figure if this has any value for me at all and even then, ah, I'm not really sure?" A year later I checked in with him and he goes, "Carrie I'm using this stuff all the time and I finally get it." Right? So my job again is kind of trying to track everybody individually in a sense and kind of coach them into what's going to hook them into what we're doing, what's going to help them understand … Well my sense of how adults learn is that … the information has to meet the person at a time when they are ready, and there's no real telling when that time is.… It's the same for kids in school. You know you get a lot of information but it's not at a time that you're ready for it and it doesn't make a difference in your life and then suddenly you come awake at a certain point because it's the right thing at the right time. So I think his right time for this was AFTER the Nexus programme. So he thought, I mean he engaged fully, he thought about it all. It wasn't that he was checked out, he was just sceptical and he did not see how it related to what he needed and then the right moment came when he … it did make sense. And all of a sudden he was like, "No hey, in this situation those things I learned are going to help me." (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

5.3.3 Dialogue – theory and practice

Dialogic pedagogy is an overt practice in Nexus. The framework for understanding of what dialogue is was explained by Jadey:

> So we refer a lot to Bill Isaacs' dialogue principles and for us dialogue is not a conversation, it's not a discussion, it's a practice … if you talk about the principles of dialogue: listening, suspending [judgement], voicing - what's the 4th one - listening, suspending [judgement], voicing - anyway it'll come to me (laughs) - like understanding that this is a practice, and listening really means listening to understand, right, suspending judgement is really just like completely again listening, but let go of your preconceived ideas, let this person voice. So, so for me it's about understanding that practice. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

During the initial few years of Nexus, the pioneering phase of the programme, participants were guided by Scharmer's (2000) *U Process of co-sensing and co-creating – presencing* that set the scene to have the robust conversations required to 'find each other'. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to elucidate further about the U Process (see https://www.presencing.org/#/aboutus/theory-u for further information about the now named Theory U). In the earlier years little attention was given to the tools of dialogue.

The focus on the theory and practice of dialogue is seen as an enabler to having honest and open conversations with diverse people. In the next chapter I report extensively on how Nexus participants report on how the structure of the working groups based on dialogic principles develops trust within the small group.

> I put a lot more emphasis on the theory and practice of dialogue because I think that it's the one important, hard core kind of thing that we hand to people coming out of Nexus is a really deep understanding of what dialogue is and how to do it, and so I think in addition to, and I think it's still true in South Africa, that you don't get people from different racial groups sitting around (laughs) talking to each other very honestly, so I think that's still a richness. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

In an earlier section on working groups, Carrie spoke about using dialogue guides to help deepen the practice of dialogue. Inherent in this approach is an overt invitation by the programme facilitators to develop courage amongst participants during their dialogue. Given that the purpose of dialogue is to understand more deeply the multiple ways of making

meaning of a situation or circumstance, this requires that people express themselves fully. This may link to frequent comments made by participants about 'being forced to …' as is discussed in the next chapter.

> In the first three sessions they have a - they call it a "dialogue guide" … who come in and sit with them but don't facilitate [the dialogue]. They witness, they observe and then they facilitate 20 minutes at the end saying "Ok, so where didn't you take a risk? What could you have done to deepen your practice of dialogue? What was the question you sat with and you didn't ask? What was the time inside that I saw you going [like] this [gestures] at some point? What was happening for you?" So they get people to think about how as a group do we take bigger risks, do we expose our vulnerabilities, do we ask the questions that make us kind of choke? And how do we engage in this? So the first three sessions have that guide and then they're on their own. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Some Nexus participants requested of Carrie to change the group composition of one of the working group sessions. Carrie explained how it came about and that it served a useful purpose to allow participants to critically reflect on their practice of dialogue. This focus on the practice of dialogue is not facilitated by a dialogue coach as in the above section, but is self-facilitated and owned by group members.

> "I want to have a working group with other people from other than my working group members. The nice thing about this weekend away is that I've got to engage with other people but I don't get that enough, so what if the next working group we mixed it up?" And so we did. The logic behind it for me wasn't "It's nice to be with other people" but I thought in essence you get a dynamic going in your working group. What could you learn from being in a group with other people who also understand dialogue but you haven't been in a group with them? So what are the things you can learn about how they've learned to do dialogue that you could take back into your working group and deepen the dialogue in your own working group, and take it to another level? (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

5.3.4 Stories

Nexus also places emphasis on the power of storytelling. Personal stories are shared to allow connections to be made, relationships to be built and perceptions to be challenged.

> Stories, you're talking about stories, someone's story, and in Nexus one of the main things we use is stories. Because you can argue forever with someone's opinion, I mean it's a no-brainer and that's what we constantly tell people, "Go to the experience that gave people the opinion, don't try and argue the opinion. Go to the story." Because the story: this happened to me, you can argue with my interpretation of it, but this happened to me, you feel it, you can imagine it because we're all human, you can imagine the humiliation, the pride, the sense of challenge, whatever it is. Those are generic emotions, right, and you can feel them in your body and then you know, and all of a sudden you know you have compassion for that person. When you're battling out with ideas, you don't, you know, and so you know we use all the time stories and we introduce, you know we even, when we go and visits we're asking the people that we visit to tell their personal story because that's where people connect and see the connection to their own life and are able to make change. And I think that, that the problem with social change part of it in Nexus is an additional layer, you know, because we're introducing them to people who are effecting change. So there's the life story and then there's the story of change. We're challenging people in different ways. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Stories open up personal lives and experiences to each other person in the working group and provide a view into the many influences that are present in that story. Carrie is careful to contrast the deep feelings that may be associated with a particular story with that of opinions, or points of view, being expressed. Stories provide a means of providing insight into significant moments in the life of a person which can lead to compassion and empathy and connection. When stories are told the remainder of the group is expected to sit in silence and to listen deeply and respectfully. This topic is also revisited in the next chapter.

5.3.5 Diversity

Exposure in a diversely rich environment leads to powerful moments in learning. It is the diversity of the lived experiences that challenges the meaning perspectives held.

> Because I think the diversity of the programme allows you to be challenged at all levels. You know where you think for example "White people are like this" or "women are like this" and then somebody comes in that challenges that notion. I mean I know personally but also through other people sharing, where I find like, "Oh, so growing up in a very black and white kind of

> environment," because all my life up to when I started working it was you know, I grew up in a black environment, taught in a black school, and - and then you don't realise the prejudices you have until you get into a space where people bring them out for you! … So you can pick up any level of diversity and you find the people sort of …all of those screens go away once they get to know the person. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

Given that diversity is such a powerful means to opening new learning, both Carrie and Leon had questions about how diversity could be increased.

> Because the programme thrives on diversity and [the participant] is meant to experience it. So for example people with disabilities, I don't remember seeing somebody from that kind of environment or background on the programme. And that is another level of diversity. But have we gone out of our way to find them and bring them? We have them in corporates, we have them in government, we have them in NGOs, we have them as entrepreneurs. So why can't we have that level of diversity, if the programme is about diversity? (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

Carrie would like greater representation on Nexus from all sectors in society. She said:

> What I mean we're pushing in Nexus is you know the importance of multiple perspectives and multi-sectoral partnerships and all of that stuff and yet we're missing this massive sector of society [i.e. government] that's increasingly crucial in making change. And the fact that they are absent is problematic for me. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Carmelita and Leon highlighted the real danger of not engaging with diverse perspectives:

> [Some Nexus participants come into the programme saying] "You guys can't tell me anything that I don't know" to working in groups, working groups, and with people with different backgrounds, different demographic, and you sitting there and you're discussing topics where you completely disagree with that person but it takes you out of your comfort zone …when I have conversation with my friends in Cape Town I so much want to take Nexus there because they're so closeminded that I like, I don't know if that's the right word, they one sided, they don't really step out of their comfort zone, and even the racism is still very high there and I'm like just "Oh my goodness." (Carmelita, Interview, Oct. 7, 2015)

> So if you have an MBA and Nexus I think that stands you in good stead, where you are an all rounded person; unlike if you had perhaps gone through a very academic MBA programme – yes, you are very sharp as a manager, as a business leader, but perhaps you are lacking what people would call the soft skills. But I would not call them soft skills because without those skills you will not survive in this current environment, which is very dynamic, which is very changing all the time. So you would not have the emotional intelligence to be able to appreciate and understand your environment. And I see it a lot because I have the fortune of still being involved in the GIBS programmes and I take people out into immersions [learning journeys], where I see how they are blinded, because they are not open to diversity, to difference. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

5.3.6 Experiential learning

Experiential learning often sets the historical and geographical context for learning on the programme. In this quote we see how a participant both goes through the experience and then reflects on what this event (that focused on shared history) meant for her understanding:

> At the end of the year, those people that come in and say, "You don't have anything you can tell me" the one lady said, "Why are you taking me back to the past?" - an Indian lady, she's like, "I don't want to go back to the past. I didn't know this programme was about doing that." And later on she said. "Oh, I now realise why I had to do, why we have to start with the past for me to appreciate where we are right now and see the difference." (Carmelita, Interview, Oct. 7, 2015)

Carrie explained the hand-in-hand approach to learning both through an experience and through reflection and dialogue.

> We hammer (laughs) to *ad nauseum* with people – is the misconception that experiential learning is about experience. And it's not. The most important part is the reflection. So for example I think you know we give them the evaluation at the end of every session and we give them a reflection sheet. That reflection sheet they get back at the end of all of them. We always in their working groups, every time we do something there's reflection built in and we constantly make that explicit to them. … "Guys it's, you can go and can do something fantastic and be totally jazzed and overwhelmed and you'll

> lose it the next day unless you take the time to think, how do I make meaning out of it, what am I taking away, what did I see?" That's the discipline of the learning. It's not just about going out into the inner city and having a fun day walking around – it's not a teambuilding in that sense, having fun. In experiential learning the learning part is the reflection and I think in the assignments in that's where the learning takes place, those are the 'aha' moment is when people in their working groups, in their assignments when they sit and kind of really mull over what are they are taking away and collectively in their working groups, so because my sense of what I'm taking away becomes enriched as I hear what other people are taking away from it. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

In the introduction to this section on pedagogy I presented the stories of Jadey, who had been through some of the experiential learning days but not the reflection and dialogue, and Lawrence who missed the visit to Constitutional Hill but attended the reflective dialogic working group after the visit. These two accounts highlight the integrity of this learning process that requires active participation in experiential learning, reflection and dialogue to deepen understanding.

> It was difficult for me because some of the emotions, some of the visits and the people you meet emotionally drain you and you just have no idea at that point. Obviously you know a large part of Nexus is the reflection process after and making sense of a visit, or a guest speaker you know, and then when you're a novice and you don't even understand you know that that needs to happen for you to work through some of the stuff. It was quite difficult so sometimes I'd be really emotional and at the same time I'd need to remain professional. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

> I think I missed the first, first class, the first excursion when they went to Conhill.… Now I am here, this is a class … So they are like immersed into this, they have been to the female section of the prison, they have seen where Mandela was kept hostage, they have, Kathrada – and I haven't emotionally done a thing … but now like they are relating and they are all like all teary and stuff and I am like "Forget this." … I couldn't wait to get out of there, because emotionally it was like all this emotional stuff that I am like "What? Why?" I think the invitation to be vulnerable for me came too soon. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

5.3.7 Assignments and reflection

Reflection is also encouraged through assignments and keeping a learning journal. Table 13 provides a summary of the six assignments over the course of the Nexus programme. The first two focus on applying learning about practices of dialogue, the next two are an invitation to explore personal learning in the context of the Nexus programme, the fifth assignment, the only group project, requires participants to share learning with a community that they might have had limited or no exposure to, and the final assignment is a reflection on their learning journey throughout the Nexus programme. The assignments are not graded and success or failure depends on both the level of engagement with how the processes required by the assignment tasks were carried out, and with the level of self-reflection.

For some participants the three to four page requirement for the initial assignment was arduous: “Very long, the requirement of 4-5 pages is not useful. We should submit 2 pages.” (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 9); and “Sometimes I feel stretched to write a full 4-5 pages and just babble to fill the page requirement. Maybe think about 2-3 pages rather” (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 10). But overwhelmingly the feedback on doing the assignments shows that many participants found the assignments useful in consolidating their learning: “A great way of unpacking what I’ve learned and made the process a lot clearer (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 10); learning about self, “I have learnt a lot about myself” and “I’m now more self aware” (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 11); and in the practice of dialogue, “Helped me practice my principles of dialogue and strengthen them” (Nexus mid-point review, 2013, p. 10).

In the next chapter I again discuss how the nature of learning is impacted by reflection.

Table 13 *Summary of assignments (Nexus 2017 Guidebook)*

Assign-ment	Title	Planning	Activity	Focus	Deliverable	Group/ Individual
1	Engaging in dialogue across difference	Identify someone perceived to be different in an important way. Agree to mutually engage	Four hours of intentional dialogue	Practice of dialogue Learning about self	Four pages of reflections	Individual
2	Dialogue in the workplace	Identify which of the four key practices of dialogue (listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing) is most difficult to put into practice	Cultivate this practice in work life	Specific practice of dialogue What was learnt about self during this process?	4-page essay	Individual
3	Deepening your learning – PROPOSAL	Design an activity that will deepen personal learning in a meaningful way	Reflect on question(s) held, resistance felt, interest sparked or fears that have emerged	Self-reflection on open-ended invitation to embark on personal learning journey	Proposal for an activity for the Community Learning Project (see Assignment 4) that assists in the exploration of this question, resistance, interest, or fear	Individual
3	Deepening your learning – ASSIGNMENT	Complete this planned activity	Implement the idea and self-reflect	What was learnt about self in this process?	3-4 pages of reflections outlining what was learned	Individual
4	Community Learning Project Taking the Trouble to See Each Other	Plan a 'Community Learning Project' in self-selected groups	Implement the planned one-day project with a self-chosen community in order to see the other in meaningful ways	Engage the Other through a meaningful encounter and to share learning with those from the chosen community	10 20 minute Group Presentation A 2-page written reflection from each group member on shared-learning, action and change	Group and individual reflection on learning
5	Pecha Kucha	7 PowerPoint slides or objects that explain personal growth during Nexus programme	Explanation of meaning attached in 30 seconds per slide or object	Reflections on personal learning journey through Nexus	Three and a half minute presentation	Individual

5.4 Participants

5.4.1 Demographic composition of Nexus participants

In order to provide a description of the profile of the participants, past records of participants were summarised. Where the records exist, the description in Table 12 contains information about the average age of the participant, percentage of class according to gender and race, and employment in terms of business sector. The data on the demographic records have been aggregated and it is noted that these records are not an accurate description of the demographics. Nevertheless, Table 12 does give a broad idea of the ages and composition of the various Nexus classes over time. (I was given access to this data on the understanding that I would not report class sizes)

The composition of the classes is typically of participants in their early to mid-thirties (although in 2016 the class had much older people), more or less equally split between men and women, and predominantly from corporate. Participation from government peaked between 2007 and 2009 where almost a third of the Nexus class came from this sector. Given that it is a three year continuous period, there is the suggestion that this might have been a project, or that a unique relationship either within government or with a person at GIBS had changed. In the first five years of Nexus's lifespan, from 2002 to 2006, the racial groupings were categorised between White and other races. As cited earlier in Chapter 1, Black Africans comprise 79.2% of the South African population, Coloured 8.9%, Indian/Asian 2.5%, White 8.9% and others 0.5%. There is over-representation in the Nexus classes by Indian/Asian and White participants, but this is also closely aligned to the country's employment rates of Black African 40.4%, Coloured 47.9%, Indian/Asian 52.9% and White 63.5%.

Having provided a very grainy picture of who is in the Nexus class, I now turn to Nexus participants and managers of the programme to get their high level reflections about what the programme is about. The next chapters will elucidate the nature of learning on the programme, and what impact this programme has had on both work and personal lives.

Table 14 *Composition of Nexus classes from 2002 to 2016*

NEXUS PROGRAMME	NEXUS YEAR	AVERAGE AGE (ROUNDED OFF TO NEAREST YEAR)	PERCENTAGE WOMEN	PERCENTAGE MEN	PERCENTAGE BLACK	PERCENTAGE COLOURED	PERCENTAGE INDIAN	PERCENTAGE WHITE	PERCENTAGE CIVIL SOCIETY	PERCENTAGE GOVERNMENT	PERCENTAGE PRIVATE	PERCENTAGE INDETERMINATE SECTOR
I	2002	-	45%	55%	48%			52%	6%	17%	73%	4%
II	2003	-	42%	58%	46%			54%	1%	8%	89%	2%
III	2004	-	43%	57%	37%			63%	6%	7%	86%	2%
IV	2005	-	57%	43%	47%			53%	15%	5%	79%	
V	2006	-	51%	49%	56%			44%	10%	9%	81%	
VI	2007	33	49%	51%	56%	6%	10%	29%	7%	24%	66%	3%
VII	2008	31	55%	45%	51%	1%	16%	31%	10%	28%	58%	3%
VIII	2009	35	43%	57%	58%	5%	9%	26%	2%	28%	71%	
IX	2010	-	52%	48%	34%	0%	18%	48%	4%	5%	88%	4%
X	2011	32	52%	48%	32%	10%	19%	40%	13%	3%	83%	2%
-	2012	33	53%	47%	38%	3%	17%	42%	5%	2%	92%	2%
-	2013	-	55%	45%	36%	5%	26%	33%	12%	0%	88%	
-	2014	32	50%	50%	29%	21%	25%	25%	17%	8%	75%	
-	2015	34	51%	49%	49%	9%	20%	23%	6%	6%	89%	
-	2016	37	54%	46%	38%	4%	15%	42%	8%	0%	92%	

5.4.2 Explaining Nexus

An oft-repeated theme when in discussion about Nexus is the difficulty in classifying this leadership programme. The following quotes support this contention.

When I asked members of the focus group to tell me what they most and least liked about Nexus, Leazal said:

> Maybe that is one of the things that I least like about Nexus is that you can't explain it unless you got into very long complicated thing and explain the whole process, because the change is so personally (sic), that is never something easy to explain I think, unless other people have been on it and you guys [in this focus group] all get what I am saying. … It's a personal

> journey, I became a better person because of Nexus, I became better in my workplace, I became better in my relationships, I became better in my friendships, I did justice to myself by opening up to the experience and sort of becoming a better me. That is what is so difficult [to explain]: it sounds so wishy washy, but it's not, because it so important. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Leazal is pointing out that the self-work required by leaders may appear a self-indulgent exercise ("it sounds so wishy washy") to others who do not understand the process and it is the very unfamiliarity with such processes which makes it difficult to explain to others. Whilst it is easier for others to understand the learning process required when preparing assignments or writing examinations, it is the seemingly unstructured and focus-on-self nature of this leadership programme that contributes to difficulties in explaining what exactly it is. Ian, who is a marketer, and a work colleague who had participated in Nexus with him grappled with finding an easy way to describe what Nexus is:

> So a discussion I had with a colleague who was on the course, and we didn't have an answer, was how to sell it better; because we both felt like "everyone should go on this course". Honestly, we felt like everyone should go on this course … Because it opens your mind, it gives you that perspective, it gives you … and the ability of dialogue is just something that you think you have until you realise you don't! And so people think that a meeting is a dialogue, so even if you don't fully accept the word-for-word definition as per the Nexus group, just the understanding of what a dialogue should actually be, is so invaluable and glaringly missing from our politics, from our senior business leaders…it is extremely difficult to quickly explain value to a potential buyer. You know if I was speaking in an interview it would take the whole interview to explain how Nexus worked and why it was beneficial to me. I think the marketing of what Nexus is, to corporates, is very poor: [my company] thinks it is a leadership course – which it is not. I think … I'm trying to think who described it, but it was one of the programme managers, or lecturers, who said essentially it is sort of guiding your own journey to realising your sense of agency, and guiding in a very loose way; Nexus is absolutely how I wish more adult education was, in that it's…. so there are a couple of struggles but it is absolutely what you put in and what you are willing to take out. So if you perceive a value to yourself and if you engage, it is an incredible

> programme. If you are there to make up numbers or to get a certificate at the end, it is a waste of time. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

Ian raised some interesting points in his reflections about Nexus. One point he made is that it takes time to explain to others how Nexus works, again perhaps owing to its unfamiliar pedagogy and why and how that impacts learning. A powerful argument he made is that learning on this programme happens by fully engaging in the learning process, a conscious decision to "put in" and a willingness to "take out".

Echoing Ian's contention that Nexus requires full engagement, Pierre found his engagement happened through having his beliefs and values challenged. These challenges came from exposure to context and then critical self-reflection. Powerfully he pointed out that the understanding comes from this self-reflection and not from established knowledge found in books.

> It is personal growth or leadership growth by having your core beliefs challenged in a real world environment. Not reading some academic version of it. You having this leadership or personal beliefs, but it is a leadership course, so your leadership beliefs challenged and almost tested. It throws you into an environment out there and it comes back and says, "Okay, what do you think about it?" Don't tell me some textbook stuff. There was no textbook to read up. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Lexie and Lerushka were participants in the same focus group, and both described Nexus in non-cognitive terms. Lexie referenced the deep inward feelings that Nexus evoked and Lerushka, whilst acknowledging that Nexus raised various emotions in her, explained the programme to others in terms of the visible actions in the programme. She also acknowledged the connectedness that is within Nexus.

> I felt that the programme was so visceral. It is still very vivid to me all these years later … I actually felt it was quite hard to talk about some parts of the programme to people that didn't have context. So you could talk about the experiences but it is very hard to - I found it was quite difficult to get deeper transformational stuff across, especially while I was still in the middle of it… it is hard for me to describe it. (Lexie, FGD3, Mar.1, 2016)

> So it was a bit difficult to put all the emotions and to kind of package that into [answering the question] "What are you doing at GIBS?". So it was a very short answer for me. It is a dialoguing and networking programme of GIBS. You don't really take cognisance of the name until you are finished it. The fact that it is about creating a nexus, about creating this space, it is only when you kind of exited the programme and you've taken something out that you realise why it is called what it is called. (Lerushka, FGD3, 2016)

Nexus was often described as what it is not. In the following two quotes Pierre and Leon described Nexus as not being an academic programme and Carrie described Nexus as not being a short duration management programme for executives.

> When I think about Nexus it is actually not even an academic course. I don't know what it is. … To me Nexus is a gem and to me it is not being correctly described or classified or - it is loosely defined. It [Nexus] is unbelievably valuable because it is this real world-out-there learning experience but it needs to be sold as that, and the kind of change that you can expect to go through must also be quantified. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

> So for me a programme like Nexus is critical because there is no other that I know of that is like Nexus, where you bring people from diverse backgrounds, to engage around socio economic issues, non-academic, there is no pressure really but the learnings are so significant. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

> Jadey and Carms do a really great job of having either a personal or phone interview with every single person and trying to explain that this is not a PowerPoint course, it's really different, it's a personal journey, it's an inner journey. Still people come and what they're expecting is what they would expect from an executive course at GIBS and so there's people who from the beginning are just like, "I don't know why I'm here? I don't know what this is". (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

For those enrolling in Nexus, the information about the teaching approach provided in the opening dinner and initial class meant that Yadhina contrasted the rigour and 'hard approach' of an academic course with the 'softer approach' of learning about self, feelings and introspection.

> So going onto the programme, I am not much of a soft issue - like talking about me and how I feel and self-introspection, and even writing assignments; because you know you are so used to writing academic type papers, going into this I thought, “Oh my god is this going to be one of those fluffy, airy fairy –” … I think when we went for the initial dinner and the initial class, you got the sense that you didn’t have to do APA referencing and it was those kind of things. So it was like you just had to find yourself and it was talking about all of the softer issues, the people stuff, and the people you report into. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016).

Not everyone derived benefit from the teaching approach in Nexus. For Joe it felt that the programme lacked focus and because of this he was not sure what he was intended to learn.

> In the beginning it was these kind of interesting sessions and we talk about different issues that are important. A diverse group of very interesting people. By the end it was kind of like this very soft kind of loosey-goosey thing and I am not really sure what the point is. (Joe, FGD3, 2016)

Yadhina and Leon described Nexus as a leadership programme that begins with self-and societal-awareness:

> So it was more about your leadership style and how are you as a leader adapting to the people that report into you and upwardly managing? And I thought, “My god, now I have to write assignments on this.” But actually, in retrospect, I have been saying to anyone I meet, even on campus or whatever, I am like, “Nexus has been the best course that I have ever been on” in retrospect – well not only in retrospect but whilst I was doing it and the journey and the experiential days for me were absolutely life-changing. … It’s a leadership and dialogue course that teaches you how to dialogue better with people above and below you. It teaches you communication skills, self-awareness, leadership styles. … Because as leaders I think we tend to think that our leadership styles are great until you actually get exposed to a lot of this material … but I always say in retrospect it has taught me so much about myself and the way that I lead people and … how I managed to turn performance of individuals through being more self-aware and through the learning that I experienced on Nexus. And further to that it is around the societal leadership, so how are we as leaders behaving today that is going to affect the broader community? (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

> Over the year people can be able to say, “Wow, this thing has been such a huge influence for me.” … But I think one is personal leadership; and what I mean by that is that people begin to re-frame how they look at their own leadership, or their own life in the context of SA. People become very critical about themselves. It is not just the first answer that comes to mind that is the first response, because Nexus teaches you to look deeper. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015).

Ngao reported that Nexus had been both an inspiration and a time for healing:

> I want to share something very profound that happened to me that makes me feel blessed. ... If you remember when we first met, this older girl, who had walked out of her job … walked out with no game plan, no second job, and was trying to recover from what was an actual traumatic work experience and work life balance was falling apart. … The inspiration has been amazing. I spread that in part to the way Nexus opened another door to a refreshing space of engaging with myself, with people, with South African issues. When I work with my team of young researchers we talk about leadership: African leadership; authentic leadership there I cannot but not draw on what Nexus taught me. … I told myself to take this course and spend so much money on Nexus but I am really feeling that it has been a journey well worth taking. I find myself - I am a lot more a happier person. (Ngao, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015).

Buyani reflected on the nature of the relationships formed with others on the Nexus programme. It was the opportunity to confront unaddressed issues that meant that, after a hiatus in seeing each other, upon meeting again the relationship was such that it was easily resumed:

> I think for me these networks even if I don’t talk to them for a year or two I meet them again and it is like we once came from a place that we formed and stormed and imbibed and argued. We have a base of saying, “So what’s up?”. I can understand the leadership aspect but I can also understand the place where we were not in a classroom. (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Avinash placed the value derived from his learning on Nexus ahead of a prestigious and difficult to obtain academic qualification: “I mean I have a fellowship and Nexus beats that” (Avinash, FGD 1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Carmelita and Jadey summarised how they understand what Nexus is: a personalised leadership programme that facilitates an exploration of self-in-context leading to a better understanding of this country and its needs, and the role that this new understanding requires of Nexus participants.

> So with Nexus it's quite, it's a quite complicated to explain. People always ask you know, "So what do you get out of it?" And I always say, "You can't say what people get out of it because everybody takes something different out of Nexus." I think it's a very personal learning journey and I know people would sometimes say, "But eish [South African slang expression used in this instance to denote confusion] I don't know if I'd like to do something like this." So it's understanding yourself, understanding your country, what's your role as South African in South Africa, what's your role? And some people may take this differently. (Carmelita, Interview, Oct. 7, 2015)

> But Nexus for me, specifically for me, it's a very personal leadership programme, not technical at all. So what, but it really for me, what it really tries to do is to give you an understanding, an awareness of the realities of society or things that are holding us back in terms of our businesses or you know moving forward in our economy or - I don't know - I'm trying to articulate this. So by understanding what society is like, we're able to find innovative solutions to move past it. … So Nexus is deeply personal, deeply reflective and through this process it's not about … it is about you know understanding society and wanting it to be better but personally what is it … what is it that I … who am I, what am I passionate about? And it's about realising that when you are passionate about something, you do it better and it gives you the most joy and fulfilment in life. So it's about finding that passion to build society. … It's about you know authentic leadership and about being authentic and true to yourself and being the best leader you supposed to be. So a lot of the process allows them to try and figure that out. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the need for a leadership programme such as Nexus was presented. Despite South Africa being into its third decade post-apartheid, there remains an ongoing need for leaders to develop relationships built on trust and transparency given that this society remains highly divided along socioeconomic dimensions. A high level view of the programme was

given with in-depth explanations of elements of some of the programme components. Next, the learning approach or pedagogy was discussed. The chapter concluded with contemplations by both programme managers and participants about how to position and describe this leadership programme. In the next chapters I report on the nature of learning on the programme, and how this learning has impacted the lives of Nexus participants. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, in recounting the description of Nexus it was not possible to do this without also revealing aspects of the nature of learning and impact of Nexus. However, in the next chapters I foreground these and provide a more theorised account of these aspects.

Chapter 6: Nine components of learning on Nexus

6.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the questions what happens to Nexus participants, as reported by them, to cause shifts in their understanding because they are on Nexus, and what is the nature of these shifts as described by the participants? What learning did participants on Nexus say was provoked while participating in Nexus, and why did this happen?

The previous chapter reported on the case of Nexus and thick descriptions of the pedagogy, programme and participants were provided. In this chapter I examine nine components of learning on the Nexus programme. These components are derived from inductively coded data. In these two chapters there is a continual interplay between descriptions of the learning events (as reported in Chapter 5, such as experiential learning days, working groups, assignments and others) and the nature of learning, as found in this chapter. Chapter 6 inductively theorises how and why learning happens on Nexus.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part begins with a discussion on the varied reasons cited why people enrol for this leadership programme. This section provides the introduction to what this kind of learning needs. As will be seen, the reasons given for participation in Nexus are wide-ranging and varied: except for those whose participation was at the behest of their organisation, others were looking for a place where the need for sense-making at a particular phase in their lives was given as the main driver for joining Nexus.

The next substantial part of this chapter provides insight into requirements for this type of learning. Here, requirements are grouped into philosophical underpinnings of the programme, how the structure of the programme enables this type of learning, processes used in the programme and, lastly, the outcome of such learning. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion about learning on Nexus.

6.2 Part 1: Motivation to participate in Nexus

Since Nexus was first established in 2002, a substantial proportion of Nexus participants has been nominated by their organisation to attend this leadership programme. The Nexus programme has, over its duration, been a well-supported leadership course for many large corporations, although this support may wax and wane over time. “We had a strong group of guys from [a multinational] and most of them were just here because [their company] said they should come … it came out in Nexus that everybody is actually there looking for something different” (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). One participant from that same company mentioned in Pierre’s quote, Yadhina, said “Last year I was nominated for Nexus … We don’t really know

how nominations work. We have asked so many times, 'How does the nominations work, how do we get elected and selected?' I have no idea" (Yadhina, Life story, Oct 6, 2016).

This has implications for managing the learning processes because those who are nominated to attend are reported to not always derive full learning benefit from this leadership programme. Carrie supported Yadhina's observation by saying, "There's a huge percentage of people who don't choose to come on Nexus, they're delegated, and they've no idea what the programme is … people come and what they're expecting is what they would expect from an executive course" (Carrie, Sept 15, 2015). An executive course is understood in this context as a management or leadership programme for those in business, typically classroom-based and content-driven.

A few participants have been self-funded. In 2018, Nexus fees were ZAR 36,000 (US$2,700) so this indicates a significant personal investment in one's education and development, especially notable for the fact that the 'qualification' for Nexus is a certificate of attendance. Reasons to enrol in Nexus are now discussed.

Several people reported that Nexus had been recommended to them by someone in their organisation (a colleague, manager or their Human Resources department), or by someone outside their organisation: a friend, coach or, in one instance, a stranger. Another set of reasons for enrolling in Nexus centred on participants looking to do something 'not academic' (this for varied reasons, but often linked to past or planned further studies), trying to find their way with their next steps in their life or careers and, in a few instances, because GIBS is seen as an innovative institution.

Pierre's work colleague, a former Nexus participant, recommended that he consider enrolling in the programme: "We were just talking about leadership in general, and what it means, and the need for it in the country. I was definitely not looking for any academic studies. He said I might enjoy the programme … I definitely did" (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016).

Lawrence's account of how he came to enrol for Nexus highlighted how his recommendation to attend the programme came through his line manager at work. He said:

> She said, "I do think if you go to Nexus it will help you embrace who you are a lot more." … And I am like, "What do you mean?" And she was like, "I am going to send you on this programme. You are ambitious, you are quick, you are all the right things that [our company] calls black diamond, but I am scared that you are moving too quickly, and emotionally I worry that you need something that is going to help you realise who you are and be able to help you realise how you portray yourself as a brand" … and there is my

> technical brain going. “This mushy stuff I am not interested in.” (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

Many reported that becoming aware of the Nexus programme coincided with a time in their lives when they were transitioning into new roles and that they felt Nexus would help them clarify what next steps they should take, or that it was a useful way to spend a sabbatical year. Avinash was at a stage in his career where he had just been awarded a fellowship and he was having to make a choice between becoming a technical expert or assuming a more strategic role. He noted:

> I had a coach at the time who recommended Nexus to help with the leadership, ability to dialogue and talk, and develop your skills as a leader … where you needed to engage with people. That was my way of getting into Nexus. Then once I read about it and I decided to join. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Tebatso, who had been in the financial services for six years, described his choice to enrol for Nexus thus:

> My heart was yearning for something that will be different to banking, particularly in the [social] development space and there aren’t many courses that you can find out there. During my search I came across Nexus and when I read about it I totally understood what it offered and it matched my yearning at the time. (Tebatso, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Those who did Nexus during a sabbatical year include Lerushka, who did not qualify at the time to enrol for her MBA. “I was too young to get onto their MBA programme ... I was told by my HR Director that if I am not getting into the MBA then I should just try Nexus and get a foot in the door” (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016), and Lexie, who had just started managing a consulting company, said:

> Somewhere … I learnt about Nexus. And it was a leadership programme … it was within the cost constraint that my company would sponsor, it was R12 000 [in 2010]. My company said “Yes”… I finished my MBA a couple of years prior and I was looking for something else to do but I didn’t want something that was academically focused … I was managing a consulting practice and I felt that I needed some more skills. The programme looked fascinating. (Lexie, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Leazal was looking for a programme that would keep her learning but not place too much burden on her. The focus on leadership, particularly in the South African context, also appealed to her.

> I just fell upon Nexus, I am glad it did, but it's not that I had heard about it, I sort of researched what are the kind of programmes that are out there … and I found Nexus … I did not want something too intense, I had finished my honours in 2007… and I did not want to get straight into something, and I knew masters was imminent but I thought, "Let me first do something that seems a little bit more chilled, just to get used to being in a learning environment again and having to do assignments and these kinds of things." … I thought, "Nexus sounds cool" and I thought. "Let me try that … it is looking at middle managers and whatever, and being in the NGO space, at that time sort of finding this middle ground between sort of being a working person but also a South African and how do I lead in the best kind of situation?" And I liked that. I liked the leadership aspect of working in a very dynamic environment. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Both Sammy-Jane and Mandla were questioning their roles as an employee or as a South African leader, and both "stumbled across" (Mandla, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016) Nexus. The appeal of Nexus for Mandla was that it was 'softer' than an MBA and provided a means of diversion from a difficult time at work and in his relationships.

> When I stumbled across Nexus as well, it's not that I had heard of it anyway, and I was in a career crisis at the time, so I needed something that was going to divert my mind. I think at the time I was in a division … [where] there was a lot of confusion and I needed something where I could focus and use my energy on, to the extent I had to pay Nexus for myself, because my boss couldn't find "How is this thing linking to what you're doing?" … I was just 2 years after MBA. … The MBA had ruined me a bit, it has ruined a lot of my relationships, I needed something that was a bit softer on me. I think that social element, the leadership element and the interaction with people at no competitive level, right, where you are able to express and be [yourself]. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Sammy-Jane, who had completed her Master's degree in engineering, was questioning the state of the country and her role as a leader. In Sammy-Jane's case someone unknown to her, but who had overheard her asking questions about her role in this country, mentioned the

Nexus programme:

> We were at a party … and we were spewing rhetoric, our usual stories at a dinner party "Why is this like this? … This is not how things must be …" and then this random lady at the bottom of the table, I still don't know her name, but I can see her … She was like, "You have to do Nexus." I mean didn't even entertain her … Sue [my friend] as usual had a fat chat with her and she was like, "This lady just told me there is this programme. It's all these things you are talking about, about questioning the status quo, wanting to reach for something else but not really - not knowing how, but also sort of being like why do our leaders not know how to bridge this divide and all of these things." And she [the stranger] was like, "There is this crazy, amazing course … and you have to do it, please look it up on the internet …" And literally that Monday Sue and I we looked it up and I just read that thing and it was – future leaders at some point in their life… but when I read that thing about "You're looking for something, you're looking for a solid place to stand while you decide what the next step is" I was like, "This is me, that's exactly who I am." … Nexus came at a very pivotal moment for me to really understand what is really happening in our country and what role I want to play, what my legacy will be. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Both Luleka and Mandla came to Nexus because the then-new business school was perceived as innovative and aligned to business. Leon Mdiya, who Luleka mentions in her quote below, has had a long association with Nexus, firstly as a participant in the initial Nexus programme in 2002, and then as its programme manager, and now as the person responsible for managing the experiential learning days. Buyani, also in the first Nexus group in 2002, reflected on the first heady years of the new South African democracy, and what this meant for emerging leaders:

> It was a new different type of education and Nick [Binedell] was a lecturer then … for me it was that there was going to be an engagement and we would talk about what we think about the country. We will grow together and become multimillionaires. … We just met White people. They didn't exist [before]. We were tolerant. Mandela was still dancing. (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Luleka's reasons for enrolling in Nexus were linked to the innovative brand of the new business school and, because her work experience had been in the government sector, her need to

understand more about views of those employed in the private sector.

> There were two programmes – Nexus and an Executive Leadership Programme. Leon [Mdiya] … is a very good friend of mine so he coerced me … and my leadership experience was in government and I thought GIBS was focused mostly on business … I had just joined the consulting firm, so with government experience mostly I did need to explore the business side, the business institutions. (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

One person, Joe, who was part of the third focus group discussion, expressed that Nexus did not meet his expectations of being able to informally explore matters of race. For him he was not sure what the purpose of the Nexus programme was. It is worth noting here that Joe is an immigrant and did not grow up in a country that is still grappling with how to bring previously legislated separated groups, with the accompanying destructive practices, together. Although he stated he is interested in race, he is not dealing with past hurts that continue to define identity in contemporary South Africa.

> I am very interested in race generally … I somehow got linked up with Carrie … and she said, "There is this thing at GIBS that might be helpful to help you think about these things …" By the end it was kind of like this very soft kind of loosey-goosey thing and I am not really sure what the point is. … I was quite disappointed with Nexus. When I was done I came away with a sense of unfulfilled potential. (Joe, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Nexus seems to provide space for exploring self, and self in context of country and career. It also allows people to transition into new ventures through providing them with opportunities to hear views from diverse perspectives and also find a language to express the 'yearning' to do something different. However, Nexus is a leadership programme, and many participants cited this as their reason for enrolling in the programme.

Whilst this chapter does not report on the impact of learning on the lives of Nexus participants, it is useful here to describe some of the ways in which Nexus participants used their learning in furthering their careers. Several embarked on further study but more aligned with how they saw their future. Luleka went on a ten-year spiritual pilgrimage, and now works with leaders in a coaching role, a few changed jobs within their organisations, and many either changed the sector in which they worked or found new jobs.

I now discuss in some depth the requisites for this type of learning as garnered from the views of Nexus participants. The data yielded nine components that provided insight into the nature

of their learning on this leadership programme.

6.3 Part 2: This kind of learning needs:

The Nexus programme was established in order to promote understanding of self, work and country for emerging leaders in a new democracy. Fracture lines established under apartheid continue into contemporary South Africa. For this chapter the data were inductively coded in order to ascertain what participants were saying about how they learnt. Nine themes emerged from the analysis of the data and are broadly clustered as follows: three themes reflect the learning philosophy of this programme; four themes speak about the structure of the programme and the processes experienced by participants; one theme highlights the importance of the country context of this leadership; and the final theme focuses on learning about new ways to be a leader.

I first discuss the philosophical underpinnings that impact the nature of learning on the Nexus programme. Figure 8 summarises the three key themes that inform the philosophy of learning

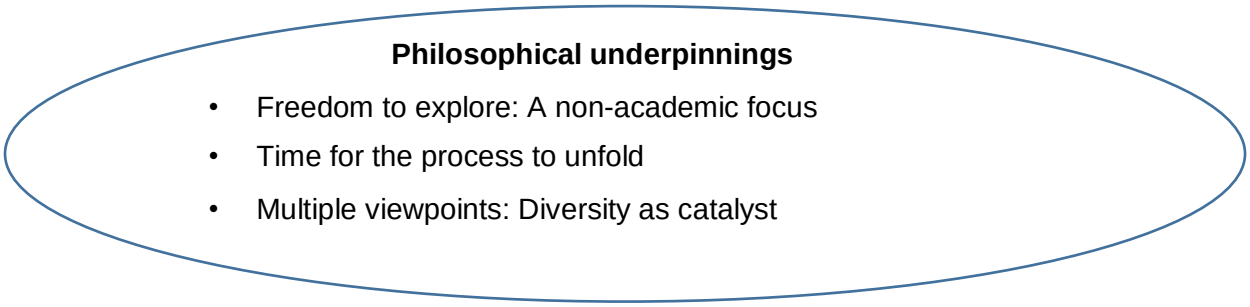


Figure 8. Philosophical underpinnings of Nexus programme

6.3.1 Freedom to explore: A non-academic focus

I begin with a discussion on how the contrast between learning on Nexus and other academic qualifications is reported by participants. Given that Nexus is reported as having another 'form' of learning, different from that of academic learning, I discuss what is needed in the programme design to create the freedom to explore self, relationships with others and country context.

When I asked research informants if they felt that they had learnt anything from their participation in Nexus, Luleka was definite in her response. For her, the lack of academic focus on leadership theories was a deficiency in the structure of the programme. However, Luleka noted that her learning, from which she gained healing of self and which was provoked in the Nexus programme, was the consequence of much introspection and reflection on her

previous experiences.

> Academically, no. I don't think academically. That is where I found the gap … Otherwise I have talked about my experience and how much I learnt from it in terms of changing my view of things and healing. I think from an introspection perspective … I gained a lot from that. (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Avinash, Pierre and Leazal contrasted how they learnt on Nexus with other more academically focused programmes. Avinash reflected that learning on Nexus was not something gained from neatly packaged knowledge found through reading, and that learning emerged through experiential events. "It did teach you that leadership you can't read from a textbook: you need to experience it" (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). In preparation for the focus group discussion, Pierre had spent some time reflecting about how and what he had learnt through Nexus. His explanation highlighted a contrast between different types of learning: that of learning knowledge about subject-defined matters external to him that did not impact his identity, whereas in Nexus knowledge became secondary and what became important was his internal world and his emerging identity. Pierre's use of the phrase 'obtained knowledge' when reflecting on formal learning is interesting: it stands in contrast to a sense of 'gaining self' whilst participating on Nexus. Learning on Nexus for Pierre was the result of having his very core beliefs challenged. Pierre also highlighted the uniqueness of this type of learning, which he had not experienced in any other forum. Assurance of learning in an academic programme is very different from self-assurance of learning in Nexus too.

> There was one thing in preparation for this session when you called … I thought about how did I experience learning in Nexus? I broke it down, rightly or wrongly, to two different types of learnings. When I was at school and at varsity I obtained knowledge. Knowledge about the world out there, certain subjects like maths and economics or whatever. … I think the textbook got thrown out here [in Nexus] and it was real leadership. It wasn't academic. It wasn't something outside of me, it was something that challenged my core beliefs and that was very different … learning how a transformer works or a radiator or a piston engine … is out there. I can learn that without it affecting my views of who I am, where I fit into the world, my identity. It doesn't touch my identity. Alex [Alexandra township], Vlakplaas, Hillbrow and all those places: it touched how I think about who I am. That to me was significantly different about Nexus. I have never experienced it

> anywhere else. I don't think I will again. The guys I know that do MBAs don't talk about this type of stuff. Even the academic leadership courses or the part of an MBA is very much theoretical … when you have this type of learning that challenges your core belief system you go through the cognitive dissonance where there is disconnect. There is momentary disconnect between your idea of the world and this new reality that gets created. There is a shift. … It shakes your world a little bit. It is not just some academic thing. Ten traits of leadership and each ten there are five bullet points under each trait. There is the 50 points. I got 90%, done. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Pierre's use of the phrase "I got 90%, done" is a rather cynical comment that learning about knowledge can result in good marks and that this learning is deemed as 'done' but he is powerfully contrasting this type of theoretical learning with that of learning through confronting his core beliefs, which in turn affected his very identity as a leader.

These reflections by Pierre on learning about self on Nexus were echoed by Leazal, who also noted the difference with her learning on a master's degree. Leazal further observed that she had learnt more about herself but also how learning on Nexus enabled her to accept other people.

> With Nexus I learnt about myself and how I present myself to the world and how I accept other people, whereas doing a Master's in Public Administration I've got skills in certain things, I know how to interpret certain documents, it's [about] technique. [Nexus is a] very, very different experience. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

It is not clear from Leazal's comment above in what sense she is using the word "other" when she makes reference to "other people". In the data there are several references made throughout about 'the other'. The word 'other', according to Rule and John (2007), can be understood to mean complementarity (as in 'where is my other shoe?'), additional (as used frequently in the data here, for example, 'the others in my group'), or as a signal to difference and distinctiveness (as in 'I prefer the other choices'). The online Merriam-Webster dictionary adds a further two meanings: that which relates to time ('the other day', or 'in other times'); and when other is seen as alien, exotic or threatening ('his beliefs are other than mine').

Othering, a means for social differentiation (Jensen, 2011, p. 65), is a process that can be seen as positive, negative or both (Petros, Airhihenbuwa, Simbayi, Ramlagan, & Brown, 2006, p. 68). I use the word Other and the Othering process in its negative sense. Othering is the

overt or opaque (Petros et al., 2006, p. 69) manifestation of ways in which people "mark and name … those thought different from oneself or the mainstream" (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 251). Apartheid's foundation was that different races are in all ways different from each other, and that the White race was deemed morally and intellectually superior to all other races. Leazal's reference to "other people" could be taken to either mean other people she meets, or it could be a veiled reference to the Other.

Another form of learning was explained by Mandla, when he contrasted the inactivity and detached manner of learning on his MBA and still passing the degree, with the more active and centrally-involved learning on Nexus. Another point of comparison made by Mandla was the focal point of learning: on the MBA Mandla placed the focus of learning on subject matter; and on Nexus the focus of learning was on surfacing new understanding and thinking about the truths he holds.

> Did I learn on the MBA? Yes, but you can't compare it. … because on MBA it's not really focused on you, it's focused on these things, you have to solve these things, you must do your accounting … you must do the thesis … While in Nexus you are part of it, in fact you become central to it, you know your contribution matters and your being there – you learn because there are people who will contribute, so you are bringing something and you are taking something … [In the MBA] you can sit in class and say nothing. Ask no questions, answer nothing and still pass. And you still have your MBA. But in Nexus your being passive is useless … there is no way you will be passive because it's so compelling, it's things you can relate to, you start opening up and saying – "Wow, I never thought of things this way." (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Sammy-Jane's experience of learning on Nexus was so transformational for her that when she began her MBA after her participation in Nexus she was disappointed in the depth of debate in the MBA classroom. What she was missing in this MBA class was a level of authenticity amongst the class members, and deeper understanding of the context of the matter under discussion. It is this lack of genuine engagement amongst the members of the class and their inability to hold difficult but necessary conversations that led Sammy-Jane to call this transactional learning. The necessary but crucial conversations Sammy-Jane referred to are probably those that have to deal with South Africa's continuing inequalities across race and class lines.

> Nexus should be a prerequisite for the MBA (laughter) … we'd have such a materially different experience if everybody actually went through Nexus first before the MBA … the egos, the "I am better than you" and all those nonsenses that we have to deal with, Nexus would fight that out. All those things are inhibitors … of performance, that is the other part, you are sitting in the MBA, you are going through these things, they are talking about social sustainability … about corporate social responsibility … about sustainable leadership, responsible leadership, what does it mean? Nexus is so embedded, Nexus is the [necessary] conversation we're not having [in the MBA class] … What does it take to be yourself when it can hurt you? You know, really hard conversations. I mean really difficult conversation. Nexus does that …because when we are transactional with each other [in the MBA] we are really missing out on that opportunity to really learn from each other. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

When asked to reflect on their learning on Nexus many participants found it easier to explain learning on Nexus through contrasting this form of learning with their other predominant experiences of formal learning. Learning on Nexus shows an absence of learning about content, often referred to as academic learning, but the results of this type of learning in Nexus focus on understanding oneself and ongoing divisions and separations in contemporary South Africa, and a deeper understanding of the systemic exclusion of some of the country's citizens to fair access to socioeconomic opportunities. Leadership is understood to be a far more nuanced concept than the reified models presented in textbook learning.

6.3.2 Time for the process to unfold

It takes time to undo meaning perspectives established over long periods of time and through apartheid conditioning. Meaning perspectives that have served their purpose so well (this is how the world works) take time to be transformed (what if I'm wrong?). Despite Nexus originally being conceptualised as a three year programme, this happened only in the first cohort, then Nexus was offered as a two year programme but most cohorts in Nexus have run for eight months. Given that each Nexus participant brings their unique life story and experiences into Nexus, it takes time to listen to each person's story, to explore the temporal dimensions of life in South Africa, to reflect, to practice tools of dialogue and to enter into dialogue. There is also a future dimension to learning in which some participants report that their learning happens only after Nexus. "Sometimes I feel I have learnt some of the stuff after Nexus." (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

In Nexus, participants talk about their journey into Self and how difficult this can be. At the same time there is an acknowledgment that for others this journey is also their struggle and will be different, a sense of "this is my struggle and I'm not going to judge you for yours".

> I think the invitation to be vulnerable for me came too soon. And my overall sense of the programme is it is too short. For the amount of self-awareness that is being triggered, there is not enough time for you to realise what is being triggered within you. … It took a hell of a lot of work. I think it was more work for me, working through my issues, and my truths and my perceptions of the world, than the whole world, you know, the other way round … But you go through Nexus and you need to come back and go inward. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

Because Nexus is a leadership programme that is not typical of a business school course, many participants find it difficult to grasp what is intended to be learnt in the programme. This is despite the depth of information that is provided in the guidebook, website, introduction evening and by the programme management team. For many, the information that is received is that this is a soft and fuzzy programme (Leazal said she wanted to "do something that seems a little bit more chilled" and Mandla "needed something that was a bit softer on me") where understanding more about Self is developed.

> There [are] people who from the beginning are just like, "I don't know why I'm here? I don't know what this is" … so when that kind of shifts into embracing is different. And there's almost always some people who even towards the end of the year are still saying, "You know … I haven't got a clue what we're doing or how this relates to my work." … One person … [in] his third assignment was, "I'm trying to figure if this has any value for me at all … I'm not really sure?" A year later I checked in with him and he goes, "Carrie, I'm using this stuff all the time and I finally get it." (Carrie, Sept 15, 2015)

It takes time to change Self through confronting the truths that serve little or no purpose for that Self and for others, and into embracing and using diverse experiences and viewpoints to find new answers and possibilities.

6.3.3 Multiple viewpoints: Diversity as catalyst

"So the brief made mention of the fact that you interact with different people from diverse groups. Diversity was a puller" (Tebatso, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). Many participants enrolled in

Nexus because of the promise that there would be exposure to people from diverse backgrounds. Nexus relies heavily on diversity as a means to shift perceptions and points of view. Diversity is understood to describe all the ways in which participants can differ from each other: race, gender, length of work experience, sectors of employment, and class. Leon described how the diversity of participants and exposure on experiential learning days acted as a catalyst in terms of having personal beliefs and stereotypes challenged:

> The diversity of the programme allows you to be challenged at all levels. Where you think for example, "White people are like this" or "Women are like this" and then somebody comes in that challenges that notion. ... all of those screens go away once they get to know the person. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

Several participants linked dialogue with the diversity they experienced in the working groups. The opportunity to engage in dialogue with those who came from different backgrounds and experiences lent greater insights into the discussions. Lexie described the group experience as a powerful learning opportunity, especially in the light of having many views expressed owing to the various forms of diversity present in the group.

> The group for me was very powerful. I was in a very, very interesting group and those interactions and the opportunities to learn from other people in my group. We had religious diversity, race diversity, gender diversity, sexual orientation diversity … there was a real richness in that. (Lexie FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Avinash described the diversity in his group as participants coming from many different places and being racially diverse. "We were a real mixture. People from all sorts of places and all colours. We were all well represented. You just spoke" (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). It was in this setting of diversity that dialogue occurred. For Luleka diversity enriched the discussions and so she realised that homogeneity was not a necessary condition for dialogue. "That showed the group that dialogue is possible and we do not have to come from … [or] be the same. It is actually great to be diverse because it does enrich the dialogue and discussion to a large extent" (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).

Diversity is also seen in the amount of work experience for younger members in Nexus. "I was quite young at that stage and being able to be in a room with people with a lot more experience than me, some of whom gave me advice and mentored me to some extent. I found that very valuable" (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).

Another form of diversity was exposure to different work sectors of corporate, civil society or government. Ian's words below reflected his learning that happened through an assignment where the group worked with a volunteer organisation, given that until then his only work experience was based in large corporates.

> Nexus was really interesting because of its diversity … it was five of us, mostly [from] corporates, none of us had really done anything in what would traditionally be called 'the volunteer space'. So we had always viewed the people that do that as having something special [about them] … it was an assignment to go and do something, really made it real, and showed it [volunteer work] is absolutely not the intimidating thing that it was before. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

It was through hearing from White Nexus participants that Leazal, a Coloured person, was able to revise her views about what constitutes privilege, associated with White people as a consequence of how apartheid was set up to favour this population group. Leazal recognised that she is in some way privileged but, more so, she saw that the privilege that Whites enjoy does not protect them from life circumstances. For Leazal White people became real and did not represent an abstract reality. Through dialogue and diversity in the group Leazal began to see for herself more connections with, rather than separations from, Whites.

> You can start seeing the little changes through every little trip that we did … personally for me it also helped me step into White people's shoes, which I usually thought was just like privileged shoes … I have always been … on the brink of privileged, my parents could afford to send me to university, but I never had a car or laptop or anything. … What changed in me in the year was especially [towards] my White colleagues that I thought of as way more privileged than I could ever be, they have travelled and done all these things that I haven't been able to do, to see them as people … but looking at privilege and saying, "This is a person, they have things that they are going through, regardless of their situation. They are not this abstract being [separate] from my reality that I can't interact with to the point that we might actually have something in common in some ways. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

However, as discussed previously, Leon felt that there is not sufficient diversity in terms of the lived experiences of South Africans for Nexus participants to deal with the realities of life in contemporary South Africa. He highlighted below that the urban-rural and able-bodied vs

differently-abled duality has not yet been explored by Nexus participants.

> So the programme is still very much Jo'burg based, it is not bringing in other diversity. If you drive about an hour and a bit, 15 minutes, northwest to Harties, there are people in that environment on the farms who operate differently to how we are. So that is another level of diversity that we don't have. ... the programme thrives on diversity and [everyone] is meant to experience it [the various levels of diversity]. So for example people with disabilities, I don't remember seeing somebody from that kind of environment or background on the programme. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

What Leon was foregrounding is that the power of learning lies in grappling with the lived experiences of people who are different from us in many nuanced ways, and it is these differences that open up space to learn.

Several participants mentioned that for them Nexus was a true example of adult learning. They felt that the responsibility for their learning lay with themselves and whatever learning they took from the programme was a result of how they had participated and contributed. This is congruent with the philosophy of learning on which Nexus is built.

Another set of requirements to enable this type of learning deals with setting up structures and processes that enable the exploration of self, others and context. This next section begins with views offered by participants about how the structure of Nexus provided a safe space for their explorations. Three processes are mentioned: dialogue as a mechanism to open new understanding, self-reflection as a means to deepen learning of self, and that this learning sometimes felt as though they were being forced into learning.

Figure 9 shows that the structure of Nexus was seen as an enabler for learning of this type.

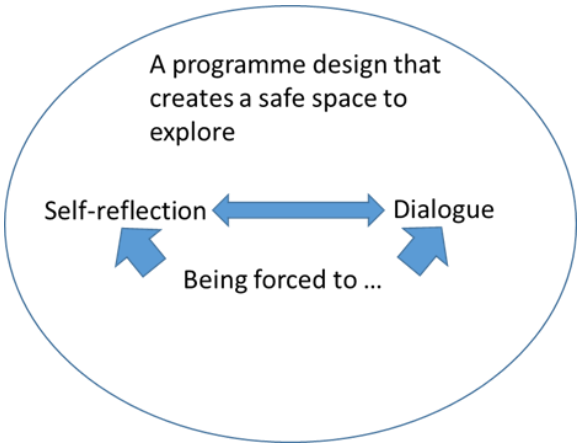


Figure 9. Structure and processes in the Nexus programme

Within the programme structure three processes are named: self-reflection and dialogue interact with each other, and some participants felt compelled ('forced to') to engage in these processes.

6.3.4 A programme design that creates safe space to explore

The focus of this section falls on how Nexus participants reported on their experiences in their working groups. As described in section 1.3 after experiential learning days, Nexus participants meet in their working groups. Each working group follows the same processes of the members checking in at the beginning, one person who tells their story, a dialogue based on a question set by the lead facilitator that is unpacked through dialogic learning, and finally a check out. The four practices of dialogue, as explained in detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4, are listening, respecting, suspending and voicing. For many on the Nexus programme, it is what happens in the working group that epitomises the essence of Nexus, more so than the experiential learning days or the self-reflections in assignments. Characterising learning on Nexus is expressed through the experiences that happened in the working groups. Here, participants reflect on how their trust in this learning process was a consequence of the programme's design.

Ian was part of a large group from the same organisation who did Nexus in the same cohort as him. He noted that:

> I had a colleague in another group for whom it didn't go well. So I have a counterpoint … We didn't [have any anger or fighting in our working group], which surprised me, because we took on some pretty hairy [risky] subjects! But it was literally the success of that first day, our group just … we were lucky I suppose, we just gelled and we chose to trust. It was almost giving trust first, which is very unusual: usually you earn trust first. But it was more a case of giving trust on the understanding that it would be given back. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

Ian's contemplation that he chose to give trust in the group before it was earned can be explained in the words of Luleka and Lexie. Luleka observed that:

> It is in the design of Nexus that trust is facilitated. It makes you be open … it makes you vulnerable to allow … oneself to go into that pain, and see the shadow, your own shadow. But you also see your beauty. You know by the time people finish Nexus there is like light in their eyes! (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

The development of trust as a consequence of the design of Nexus was echoed by Lexie (Life story, Oct. 16, 2016) when she said, "I think it is the way it [Nexus] is facilitated. So the way that a Carrie … facilitate[s], they really unlock that stuff. So they create a space." Luleka's metaphors of seeing one's own shadow, and then gaining light in one's eyes, and Lexie's sense of being unlocked all convey a sense of new understanding being opened.

In response to Sammy-Jane's comment in the focus group discussion about the ability to be courageous in conversation, Leazal wondered if that was because of being prepared for this during the programme

> … for that throughout all the other sessions, suspending your judgement, actively listening. I felt that when I did speak in the group, in the big group, in the smaller group, I knew everyone was listening to me and I knew we had agreed to suspend our judgement, and that wasn't a wishy washy kind of thing, 'Oh, ok we'll do it but you know' - it was solid. … You respected the rules of dialogue. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

And Lerushka noted, "It was very interesting how they put people together and you could see that there was thought put into it. Whoever was manufacturing this thing behind the scenes really wanted to get the conversation going" (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).

These Nexus participants noted that there was a deliberateness about fostering trust- building

with others but that this required a trust in the learning process in Nexus. Luleka ascribed this process of building trust to how the Nexus programme is designed, echoed by Lerushka who noted a "manufacturing … behind the scenes" in order to achieve meaningful dialogue. Leazal's view was that the ongoing practices of dialogue allowed her to feel safe and respected when she was speaking courageously.

So what are the elements that Nexus participants noticed about building trust in this learning process? One such element is through the telling of personal stories which signals a willingness to be vulnerable. "When the first person presents their story and gives a very heartfelt, very close and private story, it completely opens the floor for everybody else to be able to do the same. Because they have made themselves vulnerable" (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016). "I really value the stories that have come across in this entire team. They just have changed the way I view the world dramatically" (Tebang, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015).

Avinash explained the rules of engagement that allowed people to both tell and listen to stories, and in this explanation he reflected that it is in holding someone else's story that a process of humanising the other also happens. His comments about perceptions of another person being the consequence of upbringing was a reference to how apartheid models persist and, in the telling of their personal story, Avinash realised the similarities in human experience in spite of apartheid's philosophy that people from different races are fundamentally dissimilar. He also noted the importance that everyone must speak, and the power and courage that comes into the group when people accept the invitation to share their stories.

> You must have a check in and a check out and when you check in, you let everyone just say and you don't comment to what they say … you just hold it in and everyone just humanises each other … I think that check in was very important to break down whatever tension, whatever perceptions you have, because you could easily come in with the perception of that person from what you were brought up with but now you are hearing their story and you are hearing something else and it breaks your perception and then you realised that they are just another person like you … everyone must speak, whether it is the quietest person or the noisiest person, the noisiest person will shut up when the next person is speaking. So everyone must speak and you hear everyone's voices and that makes a big difference … and everyone says their story and then you go into your dialogue … you don't have conversations like that with your work colleagues that you spend a whole, even years with … it is very little [few] friends that you actually have that goal, you know so much about, that you cry, that you do everything with it.

> Here with a bunch of strangers you go straight into that … when they gave us the rules, you know to say that this is your dialogue, whatever is said stays in that room and it is between you people and you don't talk about it. And as you hear one person talking, it gives the next person the confidence to also tell their story and not fear. (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016)

In contrast, Leazal was unaware at the beginning of Nexus of the structure spoken about by Avinash, and this proved to be a source of discomfort. However, her trust was built over time to the extent that she felt safe enough, and more than that, accepted the invitation to be a part of the process.

> Do we have to sit together … with no structure or no anything in this room and discuss things, but that took maybe two or three sessions and the barriers come down, it is such a safe place that you have to be part of it, you can't not be … [It] definitely made me uncomfortable in the beginning. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The power of sharing life stories created a space of trust for Sammy-Jane and Yadhina. "I learnt in that moment that the type of attention that you pay really changes, elevates the conversation. Because the conversation completely changed" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

The hallmarks of the sharing of life stories are vulnerability and acknowledgement of influences on one's life, enabled because "everyone keeps quiet and accepts", or as Sammy-Jane noted, pays a particular kind of attention.

> Those life stories. One of the very first sessions you had to draw your roots map, which talks about your life – peaks and troughs … it was that session for me that started that sense of trust because it was very transparent that people were okay to be vulnerable, they felt safe in that environment, and I felt that after they shared their life stories, that was when a natural trust was created because "This is each of our life stories and this is what has shaped us and moulded us to where we are today". Ja [yeah], and authenticity … you make your point and then everyone keeps quiet and accepts and then we move onto the next person and you give everyone the space to share … so that created the safety as well, and the trust. Because you said what you said, and now the next person and the next person: it is not an argument, it is about you have an opinion and you have a stance on something … it is

> your view on the thing. And then it moves on to the next person … we would challenge it in a respectful manner, and not in a way to get the response that I want to hear, but if you can substantiate why you have that view then I will respect your view. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

Luleka extended Yadhina's observations about how life stories explain how each person has been moulded and shaped. However, for Luleka, the shaping of a person's life story was a consequence of the system, where system is understood to be powerful socioeconomic and political dynamics. Connections in the group happen through an exploration and sharing of life experiences and acknowledging the role that emotions play in each person's life.

> I think in the sharing, in the exploring of who we are, we realise that we have similar journeys. They may have happened in different contexts but soon we realise how similar we are as human beings – our vulnerabilities and things – and … how the system has shaped us, by the power of the system. And pain, when we share our pain we seem to … there is a connecting that happens when we share our pain, and maybe it is that vulnerable space that we get into, that reminds us of our humanity. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

The "different contexts" that Luleka was referring to was a nod to how the influence of the apartheid government, and the continuing divides between people of different class and race, continue to exert impact on each person's life journey.

Sammy-Jane also linked experience and emotions as part of life stories, and the commonality that was felt amongst the members of the group that helped foster trust. "Nexus makes everything valid, everything valid, your experiences valid, your emotions are valid, so too everybody else's, there is a sort of ease that settles in the group so easily that nothing is trite anymore" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

Lexie summarised much of what has been said by other participants about the process of building trust through sharing life stories with each other. She noted that in this space where trust existed, she was able to have difficult conversations whilst at the same time taking joy from the others in the group.

> It is modelled by the people that you meet … we got to meet different people that tell some pretty incredible stories actually. … And then we were really lucky with our small group because we got to know each other so well. … once you have told the stories and know all these things about each other … it is just like almost in a sense you are from there able to switch into a space again where you just take joy in each other! So it's to have the difficult conversations but in a space that allows you to just really enjoy each other as human beings. I thought it was profound. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

It is interesting to note that Pierre, Mandla and Buyani all spoke about incidents that occurred in their working groups where trust had not been sufficiently established. Buyani was part of the first Nexus group in 2002. At that time South Africa was entering its eighth year of democracy and the business school was still very new, having been established in 2000. Buyani, Pierre and Avinash were part of the same focus group. Buyani (Nexus 2002) was a participant in Nexus at the time of its establishment, Pierre (Nexus 2007) during the middle years and Avinash (Nexus 2013) more recently. Given that their participation spanned the beginning to latter years of Nexus, they reported different experiences of their working group interactions. Avinash's description of the self-facilitated, process-driven working groups in which the practices of dialogue were foregrounded stand in stark contrast to Buyani's experience of his working groups: "For us it was you bring your own knobkerrie there. Somebody else brings an assegai. …. After that argument we all leave without [closure] - you meet them again the following day but now you will have two knobkerries" (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). Knobkerries are clubs with a knob at one end, and assegais are short spears. The sense in which Buyani was using these objects was to convey a sense that the matter could only be resolved through a fight using weapons. Pierre responded to Buyani's description saying, "Buyani is right. There wasn't a lot of debriefing after our sessions … you have these heated discussions and then you have to figure it out for yourself, which I thought was quite nice."

A consequence of not setting up the responsibility of creating a safe place with the working group participants in the early to middle stages of the Nexus programme was that some people chose to leave the programme. Both Pierre and Mandla (who both participated in the same Nexus year) recounted stories in each of their working groups where a race-based dispute meant that each group lost a member. In Mandla's case a White man left the programme, in Pierre's instance it was a Black woman.

> On the race issue, it was a bit thorny. We went to the Apartheid Museum and came back and debriefed. In fact we lost one person. That was notable, one person could not stand it. These people were sharing their own experiences about how they see race … I think maybe he left [the programme] too early, before he could see that nobody meant any malice, people were really just pouring out… It was during the dialogue … he reacted, he was very defensive and in the next sessions he wasn't there, in fact he dropped out of the programme … It became too much for him … maybe the views didn't come at the right time for him. … during the interaction everybody just keeps popping, you keep popping and you say whatever you need to say, and some of it created conflict at that time but it depends how you take it, but had he stayed maybe two sessions more he would have realised that this programme is really about reflecting, in fact being naked and clothing yourself differently but first make yourself naked and then pick up whatever garment fits later and then be comfortable in it. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

> They got into this heated discussion … We were all actually quite sorry that the lady didn't come back. She studied in the US. She had top qualifications from the US. So during the apartheid years she was there and came back late nineties back to South Africa. He made a comment that we need to move on. He is a White guy, she is a Black lady. He was all relaxed about the rainbow nation and everything is hunky-dory and he made this comment that we must just move on and she took offence. We had a massive discussion about how can you just move on from something like that? It was a huge eye opener I think to everybody in that session. I think debates are still happening in South Africa today. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

In contrast, Sammy-Jane, a more recent Nexus participant (Nexus 2014), reported a different experience in her working group when discussing race in contemporary South Africa,

> Nothing is trite anymore, there is no more of this, 'Why can't you guys get over it?' you know, the kind of stuff you hear on [Talk radio] 702 and in the media and on Facebook all the time. 'Why can you just get over it?' (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Mandla described his learning on Nexus as a special form of learning that depended on autonomy that comes with adulthood, out-of-classroom experiences followed by reflection, a

dialogic process in which understanding could be given full expression without depending on someone else's moderation, and a self-facilitating process in the group:

> Not sitting and being told, going out and experiencing it, soak it in and reflect on it the way **you** [emphasis added] experienced it. It felt like one is really in a different space, like sometimes you can say, "Now we are adult." Nexus assists you, even in the manner in which some of those interactions are handled, you don't have somebody to sit there and moderate what you are saying and tell you, "No, don't do that." The group ends up taking a whole autonomy of having the session to be successful and you take it up upon yourself, because remember you are getting no marks, you are getting nothing basically that you have to show anyone for it, other than that experience you will take with you … The special learning became the centre of the whole thing that I loved about it and the fact that you have to self-regulate and in fact you do things the way that is comfortable to you as a group. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The building of trust is enabled through the creation of spaces that people find safe and where they are responsible for maintaining that sense of safety. In order to do this the rules of dialogue are observed, as well as providing every person in the group with space to speak. This space to speak happens through a dual process: there is the expectation in the group that everyone will speak, and also that when a person is speaking each member of the group pays full attention to what is being said, but with a sense of respect for what that person says.

The creation of safe spaces through listening and giving voice, means that the invitation to vulnerability can happen through storytelling and the validation of lived experiences. Some Nexus participants saw that this leads to the humanising of those previously deemed as 'Other'. Lexie summarised it thus:

> To create an environment where people can tell you their deepest, darkest most vulnerable underbelly stuff and not only do you listen to them and appreciate them but it kind of generates a deeper level of connection … if you can listen to somebody, really listen to somebody [with] non-judgement, listening, voicing, respecting. If you can do that, you can create trust. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

Lexie pointed out that it is in the creation of trust that connections with others and self can happen. The forging of relationships based on trust is enabled through dialogue, the focus of

this next section.

6.3.5 Dialogue as opener for new meaning to emerge

In reflecting about the process of dialogue, Yadhina made a powerful statement about the generative power of dialogue to create further opportunities for yet more dialogue, and the consequence is that new understanding emerges. “We [would] dialogue actually about it further … and allowed for more dialogue to happen – which always opens room for new things to emerge” (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016).

This ability for the group to find new meaning and understanding was supported by Lexie who noted:

> I found that as South Africans speak, as they are forced to debate things through introspectives [introspections] - they/us/we – you know we get moments of breakthrough where we surpass our own mental models and our own mind-sets and we start to get a glimpse of the fact that a) our life experience is limited and b) a bit of curiosity gives you access to the real richness of other perspectives out there. … I think there are so many issues to actually have conversations about, and so many levels of understanding. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

It is noteworthy that Lexie highlighted the particular South African context of these dialogues. Often the debates that Lexie referred to in her comment above relate to undoing of past perspectives, which she called mental models and mind-sets, which have to do with judgment and lack of trust of races other than her own. She noted that there were many issues that need to be tackled and that understanding these issues was nuanced and multi-faceted.

Avinash provided an explanation of how dialogue is enabled through a fairly structured process. It is this structure that creates what he called a ‘protected circle’ in which free speech becomes possible. Another factor that creates deeper understanding is the diversity of the group both in terms of their work and life experiences, what Avinash noted as ‘all sorts of places’, and race, or in his words ‘all colours’. It is this diversity that Lexie noted above that fostered a “curiosity … [of] the richness of other perspectives.”

> They gave us a guideline on how you should check in, how you should check out and the questions that sparks the conversation. … Discussions would become heated but … it almost felt like no-one was being punished for saying what he wanted to say. Everyone just let everything out and you each were given a turn to speak and I think that made it easier because you could say your say. If someone said something and you felt offended you could say it and you could talk it out. So everybody could understand it. … It became a nice protected circle … It was really free speech in there. It was free in the sense you could say what you wanted to talk and you didn't have to feel you are going to offend someone. We were a real mixture. People from all sorts of places and all colours. We were all well represented. You just spoke. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

What is significant is that there is not an avoidance of challenging the viewpoints of others in dialogue because the purpose of dialogue is to surface diverse perspectives. What Avinash was highlighting is the importance of expressing one's views in such dialogue, so that "everybody could understand it." Ian, who confessed a natural reticence about expressing his views, told me:

> It might not have been an overt teaching in Nexus but the need for other members or other people in a dialogue to get input from each person. If there are five or six usually I would withdraw, just shutdown: I would say something if I vehemently disagreed with what they were saying, but otherwise I would just observe. Not that I wasn't interested and not that I wasn't listening – I was doing both of those - but I wasn't speaking. I think dialogues, you know the value of the silent voice, Nexus's silent voice really made me think, "Really I do need to [talk]" even if what I think I am saying is mundane, it might spark something or it might reaffirm something. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

In thinking about how the process of dialogue unfolds Ian has moved from only speaking when he vehemently disagreed to an active contributor to the dialogue in which the purpose of his speaking was to affirm a viewpoint or to kindle a new opportunity to create further dialogue. Ian also highlighted that listening to others sometimes required a spoken response to help further the dialogue.

Joe noted that "[listening] just creates more space for different opinions. It creates more space for people to find their own way … for more learning and you don't just feel like you have the

answer and the next step already decided" (Joe, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016). Again Joe highlighted that listening creates spaces for learning, but also that there is shared responsibility for understanding the matter at hand. Listening was reported as a key component in the dialogic process. Yadhina, Lerushka and Sammy-Jane provided their views on how listening helped them to develop better understanding of matters under discussion.

> The whole active listening, suspending judgement, voicing and respecting – those four keys stood out for me … it is so powerful because for me active listening – I was the one person if somebody spoke to me, before he could finish a sentence I will already try and finish a sentence for you, or I have already created a judgement in my head or an answer about what the situation should be. And it is really caused me to stop and to listen and to listen intently, like you know not just listen to hear what somebody says but actually listen wholly to what they are saying … just quietening my own inner voice. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

Lerushka was able to maintain her own views and opinions whilst simultaneously listening to the views and opinions of others. Here she expressed her wonder at how unexpected people were able to teach her new things.

> You need to suspend judgement and … for me that was my first taste of being able to listen to both sides and have my own opinion but at least allow the discussion to continue and learn from it. It was amazing if you just gave someone who you disagree with a bit of space to speak how much you actually learned from that person. Then you realise it [the issue] is not so black and white. (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Listening is a two-way street. For Sammy-Jane to have someone listen to her and to be aware of the quality of this listening, both validated her feelings of marginalisation because of her race, but also raised awareness of the commonality of feelings of discrimination and hurt amongst South Africans of all races. An additional point worth noting is that for Sammy-Jane new understanding for her was elicited through being able to voice inner thoughts and feelings that up until that moment she was not aware of herself.

> I just said it … "For the longest time I have hated White people" and there was no malice … I was sitting next to a young man who we had been having a great time all day and he was like, "What am I supposed to make of this?" He was a white male, an Afrikaner … It got so bad so quickly, then someone

> else was like, “Practice the course. Why do you say that, what experiences did you have?”. I just started talking about things that I did not even know that were there, all these things started coming out. I started talking about things that I did not even know I was carrying around with me and … this young man … who was sitting next to me, he sat quietly and gave me the gift of his unbiased listening and he looked at me and went, “Oh my gosh! It is exactly how I feel about the English because they put my ancestors in a concentration camp.” We had this exact moment that you were talking about, it’s like a popping of - because obviously it was very tense before that but it was just this popping sensation and we all just sit in that realisation that we have all been through this before, we know it, we know it intimately, we know these hurts and pains that we are carrying around, in my case not really aware and not at that level, I was saying things that I was shocking myself of. I was like “Where did that come from?”. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

In response to a question about what happens under conditions of dialogue, Mandla said:

> You feel liberated. … You feel nobody is going to use this against me. It’s stuff that you may not have told other people and this space is created where you can be genuine about and not try and talk something that should be palatable to anybody, but what it is. Without saying, “Eih! But what is he going to say when I am finished?” … In that space you feel you can say what is the way it is without thinking that somebody is going to have any use of it that could be harmful to you. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Mandla’s use of the word ‘liberation’ emphasises how the process of dialogue opened his own world. The power of being able to fully express one’s views under conditions of non-judgement or that these views would be used against the person was what created a sense of freedom for him.

Dialogue is a process followed intentionally by all participants whose purpose is to deepen their understanding of the matter under discussion. There is no judgement on the correctness or validity of views expressed: the sum of views contributes to a deeper understanding, and allows each person to both hold and moderate their points of view. In order to get as many views as possible diversity of life circumstances, work experiences and sectors, race and class are important.

In this discussion on dialogue as a means to open new meaning and understanding,

participants reported on how the process with diverse others fostered new learning. In the next section the spotlight falls on self-reflection in which learning about Self and one's beliefs comes under scrutiny.

6.3.6 Self-reflection

For many participants the practice of reflection was a new experience. One participant, Leazal, reported that she was forced whilst on Nexus into having to reflect, and that she found the process of reflection very difficult.

> That forced reflection was a bit annoying at first. But afterwards you realised you should also actually take this time to think about what has just happened. … It is not something that I do in my everyday life, I don't meditate or sit and think about what maybe happened in the day … and you are almost forced to do that. There is a discomfort and fidgety feeling. "Can I go now?" (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Ian also found the process of reflection something new that he had not done before. For him there was great ongoing value in reflection (sitting back and thinking) and he linked the process of reflection to thinking about his thinking.

> It was certainly new for me: was the value of reflection. … I never valued sitting back and just thinking [reflecting], or writing it down, as was the requirement for some of our submissions. … [the assignments] were very reflective, and I had never done that [before]. You know I had come up, classic boys' school, university business degree, there is no reflection there, there is no thinking – a lot of academic work but no thinking. That [reflection] was massive for me. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

Another participant, Yadhina, discovered the practice of reflection through the assignments she had to complete during Nexus, and she noted that she found it an introspective and challenging process that caused her to move away from being comfortable in her thinking. She also noted that there is an iterative process that comes about during reflections.

> Those assignments actually caused me to sit down and do proper introspection on myself, and some of the practices that I needed to come back to work and challenge myself and step out of my comfort zone … because the reflections actually causes you to go back and think. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

For Lerushka her reflections on Nexus were caused by the challenges that arose during the programme. Interestingly, her reflections focused on feelings elicited during a Nexus event, and these reflections helped her when similar feelings arose outside of Nexus. Lerushka saw the process of reflection as a means to build herself and identity.

> It wasn't just the mind. Nexus didn't just engage the mind, it challenged the mind, it challenged your assumptions. You would go home sometimes and try and figure out why you are feeling how you are feeling after, and you can't put your finger on it. … You've got to spend time actually thinking about it. The next time you are sitting in a meeting … and you get the same feeling and you are like, "I've felt that before, what is that?" And so just being able to reflect and build yourself as a person. (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).

Many participants reported on the value gained from being able to reflect, and many continued to practice reflecting.

> You give yourself time to block off the noise, to not think about work, to not think about family or any other thing, just to reflect and think about that specific day or what just happened or the discussion you have just had. There is value in that, I think you can carry through to most of your life. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Alexandra Township, known colloquially as Alex, is an historical settlement for Black people, situated adjacent to the wealthy business hub of Sandton in Johannesburg. Covering just under 7 square kilometres and home to approximately 179 600 people, this densely populated suburb is not a place that is familiar to many White people. Alex is one of the sites visited by Nexus participants on an experiential learning day. In the following quote Mandla, who knows Alex, commented that being in Alex with others who see it afresh caused him to reflect about how he understands familiar places.

> It was revealing to yourself things that you didn't know about your surroundings which had a lot of reflection on yourself in terms of how you perceive your surroundings. I had been to Alex before, but when I went with Nexus to Alex I reflected on Alex differently from that experience when I went with the group. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

For many Nexus participants, the process of self-reflection was a new and sometimes difficult activity, but once participants started to reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, many found great value in reflecting, even after the Nexus programme. Self-reflection is seen as allied to

learning and as a means to challenge how to think about things. For some, self-reflection helps to build identity and to reveal new perceptions.

Throughout the programme participants move between the processes of self-reflection and dialogue. A very surprising finding (to me) were the reports by participants of 'being forced to'. This is the next topic I discuss.

6.3.7 Being forced to …

Frequently research participants referred to being 'forced to' carry out certain actions in Nexus. Pierre used the phrase "being in the crucible" and Sammy-Jane spoke about Nexus participants being milled and churned through the process. It is interesting to note the use of this phrase given that Nexus is a nonformal adult learning intervention, and participation is voluntary. Embedded in nonformal education is the notion that those engaging in this form of adult learning choose to participate, whereas in formal education there is an obligation to comply with learning tasks. Withdrawal from Nexus does not result in forfeiting an academic qualification. The phrase 'forced to' does highlight though a sense of being unwilling to engage with either strange and new practices such as dialogue and self-reflection, or confronting one's deeply held truths and beliefs. For some, the forcing happened during the experiential learning days, either because the sites being visited had historical associations, or because the experience was deemed risky, as evidenced when Ian was part of the visit to the Johannesburg city centre. Luleka's discomfort arose from having to develop a new way of cooperation rather than conflict to find sustainable solutions to problems, and Leazal was uncomfortable with the unregulated space of the working groups.

During the final working group session of their year on Nexus, Laurie's reflections on her learning on Nexus set the scene for this section. It was through being forced that Laurie experienced learning: "I am going to miss this forcing us to get in a room, forcing us to talk even when we didn't want to and always leaving with a lesson. Never ever empty. There was always something coming out of it" (Laurie, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015). Avinash echoed Laurie's sense of being forced to talk when he said, "They will take you to Constitution Hill … to Vlakplaas and Voortrekker Monument and Rivonia and to Hillbrow and show you the places … and you were forced to talk about it to strangers who you eventually came [to know]" (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016).

For Leazal, the sense of being forced to confront personal understanding was the essence of learning on Nexus.

> You're here to talk to people in a setting that's not regulated … the course in its entirety forces you to – that is the difference, that it forces you – you are this person now, who takes time out of your life to do this [Nexus programme]. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Sammy-Jane's metaphors in the following quote all convey a sense of forceful change: she spoke about participants being milled, churned, and knocked sideways.

> Nexus? Transformation is going to happen, you are going to change, you may be pissed off but you are what we are milling here, you are the actual substance that we are going to just churn it up, we are going to knock you a little bit here, we are going to challenge you there, you don't even know [to expect it] because it's just this seemingly innocuous excursion to the number four mine (sic) at the Constitutional Court and you have no idea of what is about to happen, and you just get knocked sideways. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Some of Sammy-Jane's experience of being milled or churned or knocked sideways arose out of unexpected reactions that happened during experiential learning days. She said that at face value all appeared innocuous, and then unexpectedly she was "knocked sideways". Her reflections above carry a sense of great emotional turmoil, of anger and confusion.

For many years Johannesburg was reputed to be one of the most dangerous cities in the world. While it is no longer one of the world's most dangerous, like all other major cities, visiting the inner city of Johannesburg can be unsafe. One of the experiential learning days is framed as the Inner City Treasure Hunt (but referred to as an 'amazing race' by the participants). Ian explained how threatened his personal safety felt on that day, and in a throwaway line mentioned that some of his perceived danger came from being a White person in a city populated predominantly by Black people.

> I did feel threatened, I did not feel safe – not necessarily because we were placed in dangerous situations … I hadn't been given the opportunity to be in control of my surroundings, or at least sufficiently aware. I am one of those guys that if you tell me I have to go to somewhere in the city I will have researched all the routes to get there, and where to park and what is around it, and what should I avoid. I will know. So to just put me in the city like that – I was deeply uncomfortable. … I did honestly think sometimes they were being a little bit reckless … like the walk that we did through downtown

> Johannesburg. I don't know, maybe it is just my White prejudice getting the better of me, but I didn't feel safe (laughs). (Ian, Life story, Oct 3, 2016)

Leazal, who from her comment "one of the White guys" did not know Ian, recalled this event and Ian's response to this experiential learning day

> I remember (I don't know why I still remember this) - on our amazing race through the Jo'burg CBD, one of the White guys in our group, he got very angry. We were in the taxi rank area, and he was angry: "This is dangerous, they clearly have not thought this through." That was his reaction, we were just like "Woohoo, let's get to the next one, relax!" … So seeing the change … that happened in him towards the end of the programme was incredible. He made the same kind of testaments to sort of [say] "I never knew." (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

One person reported an internal struggle that arose as a consequence of the cooperative and supportive approach to resolving problems. Luleka was used to a more confrontational means to solve issues. In the working groups she encountered those willing to work with her to change the status quo, despite coming from backgrounds diverse from hers, and perhaps even formerly adversarial positions. Luleka had to shift from defending her position and fighting for her viewpoints to be acknowledged, to co-creation of problem solving.

> And I struggled I must say, I struggled within the working group. I really was challenged. And I knew, it was a confirmation that, "You have issues to work with as an individual" … The struggle was just connecting with people … from a collaborative space. I was used to fighting, fighting the system, rebelling, challenging. So this was a different way of engaging, saying, "Okay, we are about changing the system. We know what it is about. So your method is fighting and rebelling, you know? But now we are co-creating in a different way which is a more collaborative way." So I was challenged with collaborating, because in fighting [the system], collaboration is compromised to a certain extent. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

And for some the being 'forced to' happened in dialogue, and through the process of trying to understand the viewpoints of the other. Ian's reflection below highlights the collaborative efforts to deepen understanding of the issue under discussion.

> So that was a complete shift in my thinking … you really had to dig hard to get there … So when we first started discussing it you get this immediate push back, like "No" – and the work to go from "No" to actually "Why?" was hard work. It was not like people were crying or fighting but it was hard dialogue to get there. We managed it in an evening, so it wasn't like it took us weeks. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

The first set of data I collected from Nexus participants was in a focus group in which there were four research informants. In this group one of the members, Pierre, told many stories about moments of being forced to confront his understanding in the Nexus programme. The other focus group members also used the phrase 'forced to' and I ascribed this to the fact that the concept had been ardently reinforced throughout the discussion by Pierre.

> They kind of put you a bit into a pressure cooker and say "Okay, now talk about it." They kind of forced you to talk about some of the tougher topics.

Later Pierre said:

> That is what I experienced there in Nexus. It forced you to look at all different angles.

Again Pierre used the expression of force when he said

> They both got … forced for a second there out of their comfort zone. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

However, across all the datasets several others also used this sense of being forced to do something they were initially unwilling to do. The expectation that everyone had to listen to the viewpoints of others without judgement, and then that each person had to speak may be the reason why so many could recollect the sense of discomfort and feeling of being forced into an action. But with this being 'forced to' came a sense of having new understanding opened.

The 'content matter' of the Nexus programme is the exploration of country context. Post-apartheid South Africa remains beset by social and economic inequality (see Chapter 1) and it is the context that provides the basis for dialogue and self-reflection. Figure 10 shows that the relationship between the programme structure and processes that are deeply embedded in the socio-historical context of the country.

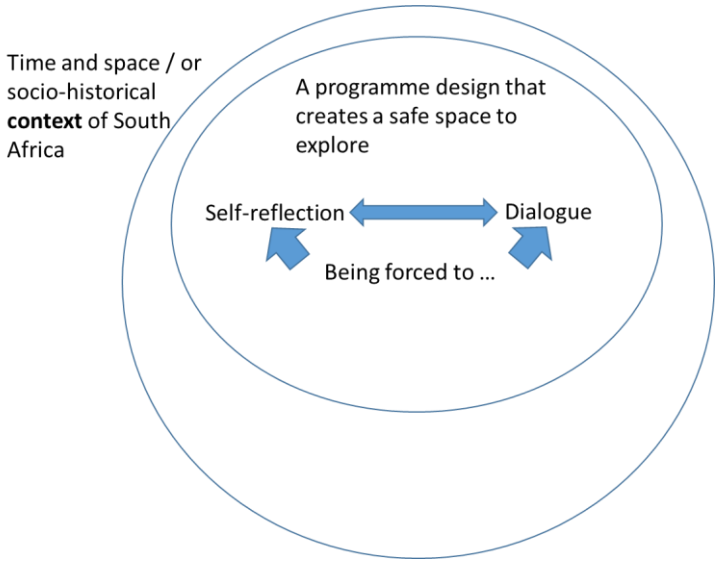


Figure 10. Socio-historical context of post-apartheid South Africa

6.3.8 Exploration of socio-historical context of post-apartheid South Africa

The generation of South Africans born in or after 1994, the year in which the new democratic South Africa was founded, are often referred to as the 'born frees'. The South African Institute of Race Relations extends this definition to those born in or after 1990 (Cronje & Kane-Berman, 2015) because, amongst other reasons, this group would have been too young to remember how apartheid impacted their lives.

Although Nexus participants are not typically from this 'born free' generation, for those who were born from the mid-1980s onwards, by the time they started formal-schooling many apartheid laws had either been repealed or were relaxed. The participant mix in Nexus comprises those who lived through apartheid, and thus understand first-hand the lived experience of this political dispensation, and those who did not experience apartheid directly but understand it through their parents and families. That being said, our history continues to impact social cohesion and the nation building project. This was aptly conveyed by Sammy-Jane when she said, "The weight of this history that we all hold together, let us stop pretending that it doesn't matter, it matters" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

In an assignment an anonymous participant offered a background story illustrating where her understanding of apartheid originated and how it was reinforced in her home.

> In my very early years as a child growing up in a staunch Hindu home with two families and my grandparents (14 people), I remember my grandmother always instructing her grandchildren to do things in a particular way … I grew up in a home that was very open minded but was always taught that the 'White man' is most superior and we should fear them and give them the respect in the workplace. We were not seen as equal to Whites in my grandmother's eyes. I went to an Indian/Black government school and when I entered university I found it extremely difficult to transition and engage with Whites on an equal level. (2016_Participant 07_Nexus Assignment 2)

Lawrence, a Black man, could not understand how his father, who held such authority and power at home, was transformed into a less-than-powerful person when dealing with his White manager. As a young child he did not understand how apartheid required that those not White had to be subservient to Whites, but the memory and disconnect remains with him still today.

> My dad being an African community, you know you have dad, head of the household, you know the sign of everything is power, everything dominance. But to see him transition that quickly and go into submissive role, for me was very foreign. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

So how do people become aware, in post-apartheid South Africa, of how apartheid impacted the lives of those repressed under this system? And how do those Nexus participants who lived through apartheid provide insights to those who did not have this indignity present in their lives? Many participants were able to discover the "weight of this history", in Sammy-Jane's words, through the experiential learning days and dialogue.

Yadhina, in her reflections below, contrasted having knowledge of apartheid from her family with that of experiencing some of what the reality of a life under apartheid meant, and recalled a visit to the Women's Prison at Constitutional Hill.

> The journey and the experiential days for me were absolutely life-changing because I think growing up in SA and with my parents talking about apartheid and the effects of apartheid and stuff, we always knew of it, but it never hit home like it hit as we did those experiential days: when you went to the places where the women were kept hostage and with no sunlight and everything was in darkness, and you know reality hits home in terms of what people had to endure back in the day. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

In many of the quotes that follow in this sub-section, participants mention a particular site,

Vlakplaas, which is the final visit on the first experiential learning day of the Nexus programme. Vlakplaas is a farm situated west of Pretoria, where the apartheid government had in 1979 established the headquarters of the counterinsurgency unit of the South African Police. Many anti-apartheid activists were brought there, tortured and murdered. Although Vlakplaas is now abandoned and access is difficult to arrange, it serves as a stark reminder of atrocities carried out by the government of the day on those opposed to apartheid and the State.

Like Yadhina, Avinash too contrasted knowing about apartheid through his parents' lived stories, with that of deepening his understanding of what the experience of apartheid was like through the experiential learning days. The experience of being in these places which are markers of how apartheid was enacted changed his perceptions of apartheid.

> I would hear a lot growing up about my parents' view on apartheid, but in going to Alex, in going to Vlakplaas and Voortrekker Monument and Rivonia and all that, you get a different view and it made me want to read about peoples' experiences themselves and what they went through. You actually see a different side and you appreciate that more. It changes the way you think about things. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Luleka lived through the Soweto uprising in 1976, although her family moved to Swaziland for their safety after this event. On her return to Soweto some years later and as a young woman she witnessed people being 'necklaced', a form of execution where those seeking 'justice' placed a tyre filled with petrol around the neck and arms of an 'informant' and set it alight. Her childhood and adult life were characterised by suffering at both a 'personal and systemic level'. Luleka lived through the atrocities of apartheid.

> There is an agenda to help people to be able to tap into that pain, whether it is personal or at a systemic level to see things. Most of us do steer away from pain and would do anything to avoid it, because when we see homelessness, when we see the levels of poverty in the society, it is easier not to drive in those areas so that you don't see it: it is not in our face. So most of us are able to avoid it. But they will take you to those spaces. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

In the data there was much evidence from Black, Coloured or Indian participants about how they experienced apartheid either first-hand or vicariously. The data from White Nexus participants showed an absence of this same evidence. There was an acknowledgment of the pain and horror that apartheid meant for those who suffered under it, but there was a sense

that the experiential learning days were more observed than felt.

> The history one was really interesting – more in observing the way that it affected people differently. But also from a factual perspective. So going to … what is that terrible farm? [Interviewer: Vlakplaas] … it really got you. You couldn't escape the feeling that you got from that day. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

In the quote above and the one that follows both participants made reference to the feelings and high emotions associated with the Vlakplaas visit. Ian was personally captured by the emotions he experienced after the Vlakplaas visit, and Avinash spoke about the range of emotions elicited in the group as a result of the visit to Vlakplaas. Luleka (Life story, Dec. 5, 2016) recounted, "Vlakplaas is a reminder of the past, and the pain is there."

> Very interesting emotions after that Vlakplaas day. I remember people crying there from what they heard. I remember that standout one of how they said they were burning this one guy's body and they had a braai [barbeque] … That like hit us in tears. Then you have a group that you are mixed so you have Black people and White people. Some are feeling very hurt and others are feeling very ashamed to be associated with that. Those are the emotions that you come out from there. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Experiential learning days also provide the means for participants to grapple with multiple perspectives that arise from the legacy of apartheid, and to realise that getting to the truth of the matter is more complicated than it appears at first sight.

> Doing Nexus I realised … it is apartheid legacy issues. It is a very emotional discussion. It brings out lots of emotions from all sides … that Vlakplaas [visit] showed that it is not just my perspective versus - it is not the apartheid government versus the new [government] - it is not just two sides. There are multiple angles to get to the truth of that matter and it is a lot more tricky and complicated than what people think. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Ian also found that experiential learning days provided exposure to different sides of historical events, which allowed insights into personal experiences for the people concerned. Although Nexus participants may have held opposing views, it was Ian's contention that in the hearing of the different perspectives, respect for 'the Other' could be built.

> What was really interesting as well was the way that very different cultural groups actually built respect for the classical opposite per se. So the Africans in the group, when we went to the Voortrekker Monument, that's obviously deeply rooted in Afrikanerdom and therefore not a great place. And yet I think there was a sense of respect that came from that, an appreciation of someone else's position and what they had to do in their position to survive … that really brought that home because now you had a view of different people's actual experiences. So what must it have been like at Vlakplaas, what must it have been like in the Anglo Zulu [War], Anglo Boer War and going through that process? (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

Pierre recollected an incident in his working group where the openness to multiple views did not happen, and the consequence was offence and a withdrawal from the Nexus programme of one of the participants.

> He made a comment that we need to move on. He is a White guy, she is a Black lady. He was all relaxed about the rainbow nation and everything is hunky-dory and he made this comment that we must just move on and she took offence. We had a massive discussion about how can you just move on from something like that. It was a huge eye opener I think to everybody in that session. I think debates are still happening in South Africa today. Based on what role you had in the apartheid era you will deal with it differently. We can't all deal with it the same. This chap was saying, "Just move on, it is in the past." She was saying, "You've got no idea what you are talking about." She went into detail about experiences that she had during apartheid. We just sat there. It was an unbelievable discussion. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

The comment that "We need to move on" is very dismissive for those who suffered at the hands of the dehumanising apartheid project. Of interest is that Pierre did the Nexus programme in 2007 and Avinash in 2011, and both were contributors in the same focus group. Avinash said that by the time he was on Nexus the self-facilitation process was well-structured and that they never experienced such conflict in their working group. But for Pierre, this conversation was a pivotal moment on Nexus and he felt that it changed everyone who was party to this conversation.

Lexie, a White woman, also had a breakthrough moment in her working group. She was asked about the volte-face on apartheid. Her fellow working group member raised questions about

why former oppressors were now to be seen as collaborators, why power-over had shifted to power-with, particularly in the light of a continuing economic power imbalance.

> We met so many people that were willing to share really difficult stories with us … there was a woman in my year, early on in the process that said, "But how do we know that White people have changed their minds about Black people?" And that question just hit me! She was Black, she really wanted to know, "How do we know? Because a few years ago we had apartheid and we were seen as less than human, and now we have equality but White people still have a lot of economic power and really [what has changed]?" (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

Tebatso described a conversation in their working group that apartheid affected all people, and that this history continues to impact into modern South Africa.

> We had one lady who was of Portuguese origin and so as we were talking about apartheid and how it affected each and every one of us she made mention of the fact that even though she is light-skinned and from a distance you could say she is White, she actually also did suffer. She suffered in apartheid because of the system. [There was] … understanding how our history as South Africans affected us individually. (Tebatso, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

But it is in the words of Luleka that another learning from the experiential learning days was highlighted: that of hope for the future. Luleka powerfully described that a journey into the past allowed her to integrate more fully into society in a more empowered way, and that when she went to Constitutional Hill she was aware of what possibilities might still be constructed.

> [Nexus] is catalyst to journey into self and at the same time journeying back to society. You know, so it is like the dual journey, where you journey back in order to integrate back into society in a different, in a more constructive way … Vlakplaas is a reminder of the past, and the pain is there. … But when you go to Constitutional Hill again you are exposed to the vision, what is possible as well. So it is the two extremes: where we come from but what is also possible. So you live with a vision but also not avoiding the past. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

6.3.9 A willingness to build interpersonal trust through vulnerability, courage and honesty

In a previous section participants spoke about how, despite the unusual pedagogy of this leadership programme, they were enabled through the programme's design to develop trust in the learning process. In this section the focus is on how trust is built through and with each other. The data strongly reflects characteristics of vulnerability, honesty and courage.

Several participants reflected on how the building of trust and relationships happened in the working groups. They reported on the need for courage and honesty amongst the members of the group, and acknowledged that the process took time to unfold. Two factors that acted as catalysts were the telling of personal stories, and diversity of viewpoints and experience. The consequences of establishing relationships founded on trust were the humanising of others, fostering of the development of compassion, and learning through new connections. For some participants 'new trust' across racial lines was built. Vulnerability thus became a means to display strength.

Even though the development of trust takes time to develop it is also reported to have stability over time.

> Nexus gives us an opportunity to tell our stories … so people tell their truth and I think the space is safe to say, "This is how I felt about this before and now I feel differently" … I don't even know how to explain it, but it's how we relate to each other, and there is a difference that comes into the room when you have your own awakening and when you feel that someone else has their awakening … you feel it: "I respect you and I can see you respect me regardless of who we are." We have a softness almost for each other's stories … but it's a feeling … We can almost love each other for who we are in this space because we have decided to break down those barriers. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The decision to break down barriers stands in stark contrast to the Othering process which seeks to create distance between people, a separation and alienation from those deemed different. Leazal's description of an awakening in self, and being aware that the same awakening might be happening in others, provides the framework of the discussion that now follows. I first discuss how this self-awakening is precipitated, and then follow with a discussion on how participants reported on the consequences of this awakening.

Yadhina's explanation was that trust took time to develop, but once trust was in place it provided an invitation for others to be open, and a safe space to display their vulnerability,

which would have led to deeper trust. Jann also picked up this observation about the creation of a safe space through acknowledging that the others in her working group brought their vulnerability and courage into the discussion.

> What I experienced specifically in my group was that as time went on, as we trusted each other more, everyone felt more comfortable to be vulnerable and open. So trust definitely created the safe environment for people to express themselves and to feel comfortable to be vulnerable. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

> Nexus has completely changed the way I want to view my life going forward. Thank you, guys. I don't think my experience would be like this if it wasn't for all of you in the room and all of you bringing your heart and your honesty and your courage to the table as well, learning from one another. (Jann, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015)

In the following two quotes from Luleka and Avinash, both participants highlighted how it was in the deep listening to personal stories told in the working groups, and the power of hearing different perspectives that led, in the instance of Avinash to having his assumptions broken down, and in the case of Luleka to a development of compassion for those grappling with having their assumptions challenged. For both Luleka and Avinash there was a humanising process: where the storytellers' experiences helped to break down barriers, and granted access to those previously deemed inaccessible or different.

> You were breaking down the boundaries and you were starting to see the person as a human also, but they was coming from a different experience and their view from a different lens …. You listen to the people and … maybe it is a human thing to naturally assume something about a person before you hear them, it actually breaks those assumptions down because sometimes a person might give off this image that they are stone cold on their face, yet when you hear them speak of some experience that they just had and you hear that they are a warm hearted person. … But now you actually hear them speak, they tell a story, they tell about sometimes the hardship they went through and it changes what you think of them. (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016)

> It helped me to be aware of the different perspectives, and to be compassionate around it. And what I see is not what is: I need to hear people's stories before I can conclude … something about stories … brings the raw emotions, it brings the human element when people start telling their stories, their humanness emerges and you can see it. It is very … spiritual actually. It takes us to another dimension where we tell our stories from the heart. … and at the same time it also creates a space for … stories from different angles, and it makes it safe for people to tell those stories. Some cry, and say, "If I knew this I would have acted differently." "Okay, you didn't" – you know? Others are like "I judged you guys", and to see the system that how powerful it can be, and as an individual, the compassion comes from that where you see how helpless one can be in the system. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

Luleka learnt that in embracing diverse viewpoints, dialogue was the means that enables connection.

> They [the working groups] were quite good … we really connected as a group. It was dynamic … They got heated at certain points but they were very powerful discussions just to see how dialogue is possible even if you come from different sectors or different mind-sets. That showed the group that dialogue is possible and we do not have to … be the same. (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

The consequences of being able to trust others in the group led to learning in different ways. Avinash and Lexie both reflected on learning about themselves in new ways. "You learnt about yourself. That was a big one. There was a lot of introspection and reflecting. You learnt about yourself" (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). Lexie spoke about how Nexus helped her claim her full identity when speaking from the heart. For her it meant that she was able to share with others that she is gay, but also that her identity as an Afrikaner in South Africa is as a contemporary Afrikaner different from the identity of an apartheid Afrikaner.

> Sometimes I have the liberty of speaking as myself and I think that is what was really cool about the small groups because you moved beyond your first identity – White, 36, Afrikaans, gay … and then you start to connect in other ways. That is what was really refreshing about the small groups … The fact that I am seen first as Afrikaans, first as White, first as a woman …It is just so frikken awkward being a South African sometimes. I did also find, and

> this is also partly Nexus enabled … claiming that identity. So being able to say, "Well actually I am this sort of an Afrikaner. You may know that sort of an Afrikaner and that may be your deal, but that is your single story. … I am no less of an Afrikaner because of it." I think that is also the power of Nexus; the fact that you get behind the superficial identities to a deeper connect. (Lexie, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The ability to form relationships within the group led to Ngao learning from the others in the group:

> I found these relationships priceless. When I first came to Nexus I was a bit angst about the fees because I was self-paying but … I have met the most incredible people … I have learnt a lot from sharing things with you vibe-y people. (Ngao, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015)

For Yadhina (Life story, Oct. 6, 2016) vulnerability as an expression of strength came about because of the trust she had developed in the group. "The way Nexus positions vulnerability is actually that it is … a strength … so specifically in our group, trust was - I think we felt very comfortable with one another."

Trust in the group allowed Lawrence to give voice to contentious thoughts and views, and through expressing his ideas he was able to add to the learning of others.

> In our syndicates I … shot from the hip more times than I care to remember – but I knew it was safe … at least I know that in the same syndicate I was in everyone went through the exact same journey. Some of the guys would say "Lawrence, (shock) how you even say something like that?" And that was their journey. They were learning. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

Buyani was able to use the trust-relationships formed many years ago through Nexus to re-establish connection after a long time of not meeting. His use of 'breaking bread' is significant: this biblical reference moves beyond the mere sharing of a meal. It signifies fellowship, and may refer to moments of deep emotional experiences. The breaking of bread during communion also implies that enemies are forgiven.

> Even if I don't talk to them for a year or two I meet them again and it is like we once came from a place that we formed and stormed and imbibed and argued … We sat and broke bread and talked … and cried and sobbed together. (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

The building of trust with others requires courage and authenticity but more importantly reciprocity. Such trust encourages vulnerability to emerge, and through connections forged in vulnerability, for a humanising process to take place. Many participants spoke about gaining courage to tell their deep truths because others in the group had done so and, because of this sharing, there was almost an obligation to meet them by also sharing. The sharing of stories raises affective rather than cognitive responses, and participants recalled the high emotions associated with this sharing. Storytelling also allowed space for people to acknowledge that they were unaware of the deeper story and the need for forgiveness or reconciliation. For those who shared courageously there was deeper self-awareness and celebration of their full identity which led to the forging of priceless relationships.

6.4 Conclusion

What emerges from the last theme, "A willingness to build interpersonal trust through vulnerability, courage and honesty" is an abundance of evidence about finding the human in the Other. South Africa's apartheid past was marked by fracture lines, dehumanising, stigmatisation, exclusion and alienation between all those deemed Other. The data is peppered with images and quotes that support the many covert and obvious ways in which these separations were and continue to be in place.

Petriglieri and Petriglieri's (2015) question about the ability of business schools to humanise leadership does not include asking about healing and reconciliation that may be required by leaders, as is the case in this country. Their article looks at how leaders can be helped to see the 'whole' person in the workforce. Nexus is about a humanising leadership that not only sees the 'whole' person but a person who is able to step out from behind the separations and fractures still prevalent in South Africa today. In the deep self-work required in the programme, healing and forgiveness by the participants can lead to a re-humanising leadership. This topic is discussed further in the penultimate chapter, Chapter 8.

The themes that arose from the data were grouped into philosophical dimensions of the requirements for this type of learning, learning experienced on Nexus that is supported by the structure of the programme and enabled through three processes of self-reflection, dialogue and being forced to. The socio-historical context is the contested space that needs deeper understanding. Participants on Nexus reported that through Nexus trust across lines of fracture were built. These themes are presented at the start of Chapter 7 in Figure 10, a model of learning on Nexus. This model provides the building block for the next chapter that theorises learning on Nexus using transformative learning theory as the lens for deductive analysis of the data.

Chapter 7: Theorising the nature of learning and its impact

7.1 Introduction

The four research questions posed in this study are

- What is the nature of learning in the Nexus programme?
- What roles, if any, do emotion and relationships play in Nexus participants' learning?
- How does learning in the Nexus programme relate to personal development, broader lives and histories of learners?
- How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to societal needs and leadership development?

In the previous chapter, using an inductive data analysis approach, I explored the nature of learning as reported by Nexus participants. From this analysis I present a model of learning on Nexus as shown in Figure 11

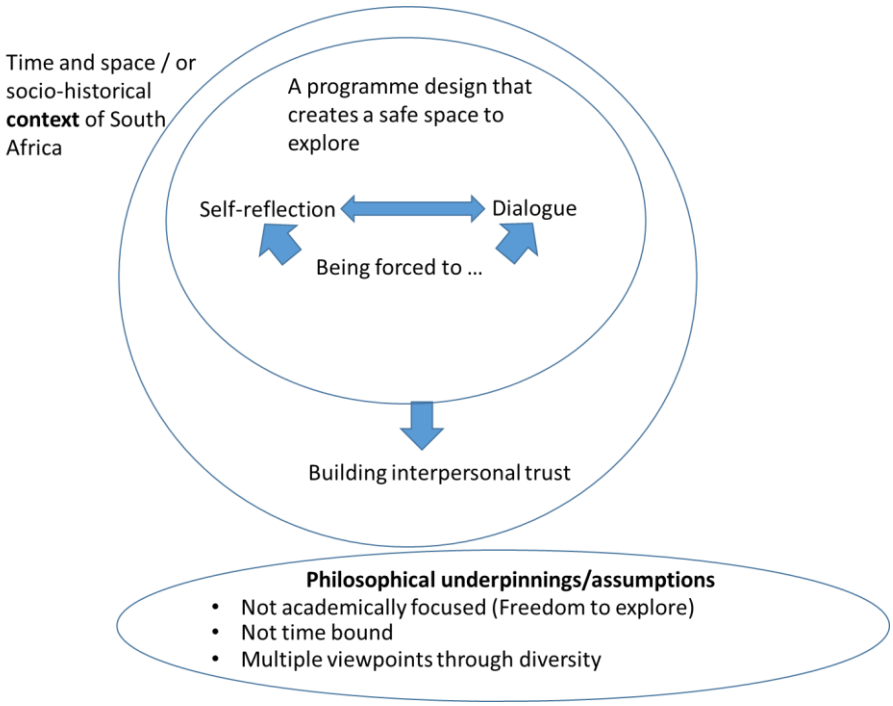


Figure 11. Nexus learning model

This model of learning is used as a basis for showing how learning spaces are created and used in Nexus. In Figure 11 I show how the Nexus space, characterised by safety, encourages curiosity and the process of humanising (a term used often by Nexus participants) amongst participants, and is underpinned by three keys that unlock learning: self-reflection; dialogue; and being forced into learning actions. From the Nexus space, participants move in and

through an exploration space to engage more holistically with the country context space. The space of exploration is characterised by emotional and relational dimensions of learning. In this space of exploration, Nexus participants interact and connect with others through encounters in the country context space. The iterative processes of encounter, dialogue, and critical self-reflection in the presence of trust relationships allows participants to see, experience and reconceptualise what is possible in the country context space.

Figure 12 comprises three main spaces. The outer ring is represented by stick figures and indicates the social and temporal context of the country space. Experiential learning days are structured around South Africa's past, present and future. The narratives and interpretations of how broader society functions in current day South Africa are provided by 'men and women on the street'. The inner ring comprises Nexus, a subset of South African society. As stated earlier, the three processes of dialogue, self-reflection and being forced to remain central to the learning process but two changes from Figure 11 are noted. The concept of dialogue is now shown as generative dialogue, and self-reflection is now shown as critical self-reflection. Generative dialogue and critical self-reflection are concepts drawn from the literature on transformative learning theory. The space between the outer and inner ring is filled with double-headed arrows to indicate the critical interactions between Nexus participants and the country context.

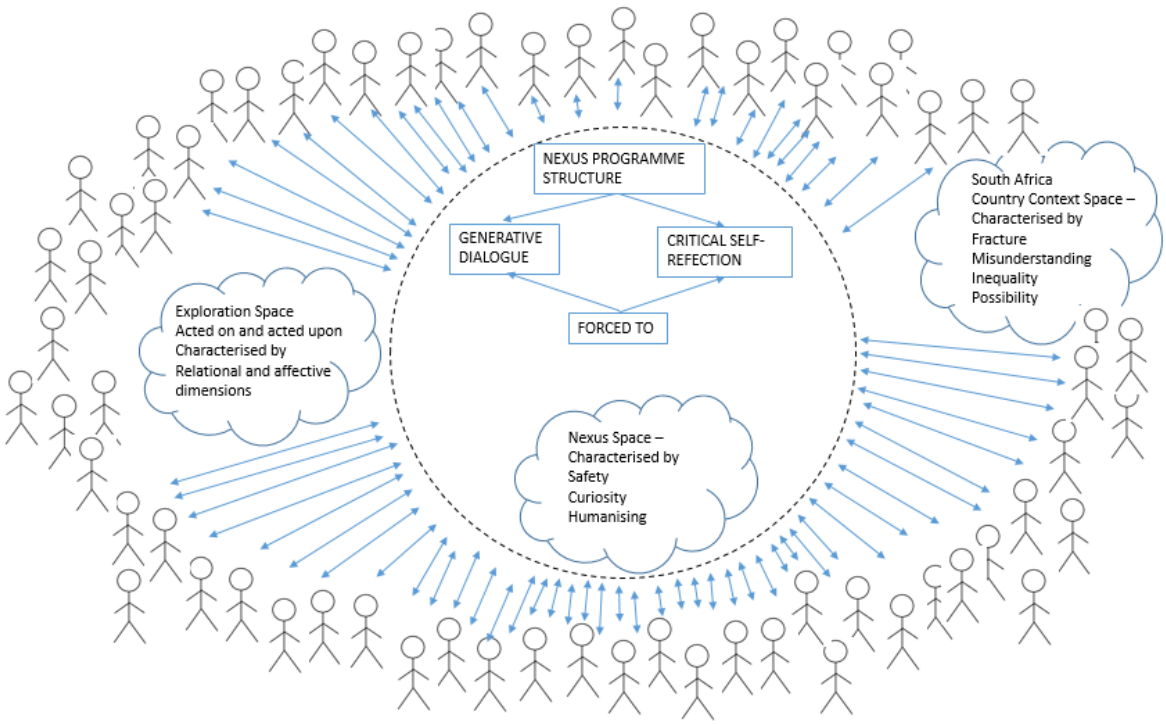


Figure 12. Learning spaces in Nexus

This chapter focuses on five key components derived from Figure 12: critical self-reflection; generative dialogue; being forced to; the role of emotions; and the role of relationships in learning on Nexus. The data were analysed using theoretical concepts from transformative learning (Gunnlaugson, 2006; Mezirow, 2000b, 2009), and Hoggan's (2016a, 2016b) framework of breadth, depth and stability of learning outcomes is used throughout to answer the research question about how learning on the Nexus programme relates to personal development, broader lives and histories of the Nexus participants. The final research question on how learning on Nexus relates to societal needs and informs participants' leadership is the focus of the last and concluding chapter of this thesis.

This chapter concludes with addressing some of the mutinous thoughts raised by Newman (2012a, 2012b, 2014) that transformative learning is just good learning.

7.2 Theorising the nature of learning and its impact via the lens of transformative learning theory

I introduce this section using a quote by Mezirow, and then provide a quote from Lexie whose reflections about her learning on Nexus resonate with how Mezirow has described transformative learning.

> [Transformative learning is] the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions. (Mezirow, 2000a, pp. 7-8)

> We get moments of breakthrough where we surpass our own mental models and our own mind-sets and we start to get a glimpse of the fact that a) our life experience is limited and b) a bit of curiosity gives you access to the real richness of other perspectives out there. … I think there are so many issues to actually have conversations about, and so many levels of understanding. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

Lexie acknowledges that she interprets the world through personally held mind-sets and mental models (taken-for-granted frames of reference), but that Nexus provided breakthrough moments (through constructive discourse to use the experience of others) into transforming

these meaning structures. She also expressed a view that there are many issues that need to be understood (understanding and thinking about meaning of a situation through a "perspective transformation" (Mezirow, 1978), and furthermore that this understanding is multi-dimensional (to make [meaning structures] more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change).

Drawing on the themes developed in the previous chapter, I look at how the data extends conceptions of meaning-making in transformative learning theory through three keys that unlock learning: critical self-reflection; being forced to engage, and generative dialogue. These are the foci of sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.3 respectively. This section ends with a discussion on the role of emotions in learning experienced on Nexus (section 7.2.4), and in section 7.2.5 I discuss how relationships impact both how and what Nexus participants learn. I also argue that it is the nature of relationships that fundamentally transforms.

7.2.1 Critical self-reflection

"Through fear, what we lost was the experience of discovery and reflection all of which forms a process of learning" (2015_Assignment 2_Participant 07). These are the words of a Nexus participant who was reflecting on her childhood years, and the influence of her family and cultural upbringing. She highlighted how fear stifled her capacity to learn, but also that learning is a continual interplay between discovery and having space and time for reflection. In this section I discuss how the discovery process has both outward and inward dimensions. By outward I mean that what is discovered is a deeper understanding of a situation that is being explored mutually with others, through learning through, with, and from others. The inward dimension is discovery about Self, what some participants referred to as their inward journey. Critical self-reflection is crucial in both forms of the journey of discovery.

The action of suspending judgement creates an opportunity for self-reflection and the space to learn from others. Suspending judgment also implies a removal of criticism in the meaning-making process, and thus the enquiry is more curiosity-driven and less fear-driven. The quote below shows that both temporal (take a pause) and spatial dimensions (step back) opened space for this participant to freely reflect on the views of another. In her considerations she demonstrated her developing meta-awareness when she referred to becoming aware of internal processes and that, in the moment, she was able to step back from her thoughts, and become curious about the point of view being presented.

> Suspending my judgement required me to take a pause and step back and reflect on the view point and the perspective they were trying to share. Whilst I didn't get the practice right, I became aware of my internal reactions and started reminding myself to stop forming responses in my head while the speaker is speaking and not to jump to conclusions before the end (2015_Assignment 2_Participant 07).

This assignment by Participant 7 concluded with her saying, "Whilst I wasn't always successful in my attempts I have definitely become more conscious and self aware (sic) and noticed a shift in my attitudes and behaviours towards a more participatory thought process." Carrie's response in her feedback on this assignment was:

> What a beautiful example of deep reflection and self-awareness. With respect to your closing statement, the reality is that you are unlikely ever to be successful in every attempt. Thankfully, that is not where success is located. Success is measured by your willingness to reflect on, and to learn from, each encounter. By the deepening of your self-awareness and your ability to see that 'getting things wrong' is a wonderful opportunity for growth and learning. By your willingness to make a distinction between what you do / say and who you are. In all of these ways, you have succeeded beyond expectation. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 2_Participant 07)

A success factor for her learning as highlighted above, where growth and learning can take place, lies in the space Participant 7 created through stepping back and becoming more self-aware through reflection.

In this quote from an assignment, the participant showed that reflections allow for shifts in understanding. For this person, self-awareness led to self-empowerment and to opening new understanding. This developing ability to suspend judgement was unlocked through reflecting on what the theory on dialogue stated.

> It was not until I reflected on the theory that I really came to understand what it means to suspend judgement. This completely shifted the way in which our time together unfolded. I was able to voice my opinions as a contribution to the conversation and in so doing he was able to do the same while coming to a collective understanding but not necessarily on the same side. I was then able to expand my view and gain an insight on many current events that I would have not otherwise had, had I not embraced the process. (2015_Assignment 1_Participant 03)

It is in the purposeful action of suspending judgement of the views of others that a process of self-reflection becomes apparent, and a more inclusive, or collective, understanding emerges. The opportunities for discovery led to the participant's expanded view and to "insight on many current events that I would have not otherwise had."

Jann too foregrounded how reflection requires time and that there was also an emotional aspect of courage to ask of one's self the 'hard questions'. It is in the pausing to reflect that new understanding emerges, but also that angry responses are turned into more appreciative moments of understanding.

> [This refers to] reflection and the adult conversations that I have had to have with myself along the journey. It is hard 'adult-ing' for the most part but then when you also have the courage to ask yourself those questions and question your own values and question would you be open to understanding the situation differently, I think that is definitely a principle that I got out of Nexus. It made me slow down and instead of reacting to something immediately it has given me that moment to actually reflect and understand. So many times when I've done this successfully the reaction has changed. Like it would have normally been a screaming match or a disaster, but it actually turned out to be a really amazing experience for everyone involved. (Jann, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015)

Another form of discovery was the unearthing of more of 'who am I?' In this extract from an assignment in which participants were asked to deepen their learnings, there is evidence of how transformative learning through Nexus has breadth and depth. This participant remarked on the congruence of her transformative learning with her faith life, and how she has been challenged to deepen her learning through Nexus. Her quote provides a connection between her outward and inward reflections.

> Pilgrimage invites you to ask yourself deeply reflective questions and calls us to reflect on where we are at in our lives and where do we want to be. More so, it asks of us to reflect on what do we need to change and shift within ourselves that can complete and enrich us towards our life in the next world (the Hereafter). In Nexus, we [are] often asked to reflect and challenge ourselves, our limitations and with the intention of gaining a more rich and meaningful understanding of ourselves, other[s], our communities and our country. This is to assist us to reflect and act on ways in which we could more meaningfully contribute to the positive change we want to see in our country and in the world. So both Nexus and my pilgrimage are experiences that have interwoven inward and outward aspects of me which I wish to explore further. (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 17)

The following powerful quote revealed the self-work that came about through sustained reflection. What Lawrence did highlight though is the significance of the time and the amount of work required to 'go inward'.

> I think the invitation to be vulnerable for me came too soon. And my overall sense of the programme is it is too short. For the amount of self-awareness that is being triggered, there is not enough time for you to realise what is being triggered within you. … It took a hell of a lot of work. I think it was more work for me, working through my issues, and my truths and my perceptions of the world, than the whole world, you know, the other way round. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

For participant 10 in the next quote, self-reflection had a strong association with a future action orientation. Her use of the phrase "inward looking activity" was the manifestation of her inner journey of discovery. For her, Nexus provided a space for learning, both at the level of the individual and group, and equipped her with multiple tools to reflect on her life before and during Nexus. She made a powerful statement that she could only be released to do more for others once she had reflected on her "deep seated and unresolved issues." This has great implications for the work of leaders, the subject of the next and concluding chapter.

> By learning to take responsibility for my personal health and happiness through reflecting on my life journey I have begun to make the necessary changes in my life and work spaces to create more goal oriented behaviors (sic) and practices … Nexus was therefore a learning space for me while I mulled on the 'what next'. Several months later, I have had one of the best opportunities for assisted introspection with the Nexus programme as my tool, mentor, sounding board and above all mirror. I have been able to deeply reflect on my life not only in 2015 but through a deep historical reflection and to use this as a platform to clearly think through what next. I do not profess to have found the answers but I have learnt valuable lessons of 'how to'. By providing a platform for individual and facilitated team learning, Nexus has provided me with a multi-lens tool to learn through others and to address critical learning experiences which will remain core to my exploration of work and life going forward … I narrowed down my project to a more inward looking activity so that I could further reflect on my personal life experiences and to work through several deep seated and unresolved issues. This was motivated by a realization that I could do more for others only when I was at a better level as ME. I had to be comfortable in my own skin before I went out to engage with and or change others. (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 10)

For Luleka, she viewed the power gained from her self-reflections both in an outward sense into the society she serves, and in an inward sense in the person she is.

> … the journey of self, to find self and redefine self, and to work on self and strengthen self – which is what the spiritual journey really is about … It [Nexus] has facilitated that in me because it is catalyst to journey into self and at the same time journeying back to society. You know, so it is like the dual journey, where you journey back in order to integrate back into society in a different, in a more constructive way. (Luleka, Life Story, Dec. 5, 2016)

In the next part, section 7.2.2, I discuss being forced to, but it is worth noting here that Tebatso used phrases such as 'pushes you' and 'Nexus throws you into'. Tebatso found that in telling his story, he was forced to reflect on his life journey and to surface defining moments in his life. This journey back into his life resulted in an inner journey where he now claims to understand himself better.

> The section … called 'Tell your story' … pushes you to reflect back as far back as possible and identify defining moments in your life. I think going through that exercise actually helped me understand myself better … it is the reflecting. Because we sort of go back. You have to go back to primary school. So yes it brings back memories, good and bad, as one is growing up and that defines you as a person … It is one of those sort of very hard discussions that Nexus throws you into. (Tebatso, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Mandla, using a rather lovely expression, summarised his sense of the Nexus programme entirely in terms of reflection: "This programme is really about reflecting, in fact being naked and clothing yourself differently but first make yourself naked and then pick up whatever garment fits later and then be comfortable in it" (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016). He viewed reflection as a process of stripping away until he was naked, and then re-clothing himself in more comfortable garments.

Self-reflection can also produce surprises: "Nexus created that space for you firstly to have those thoughts, and then for you to then reflect on them, to be like, 'Okay, what was that? I did not see that coming'" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

I leave the closing comment on self-reflection to Lawrence. In these reflections about the Nexus programme he remembered it as a journey of self-discovery strongly associated with emotional dimensions of learning. He alluded to the time required away from the normal course of life in order to discover Self. He also noted the inward journey he experienced, the embracing of this ability to self-reflect even after the programme had ended, and then the power of self-reflection to continually surprise.

> Instead of somebody saying that Nexus is an emotional roller-coaster, an emotional self-discovery, I think it is a time out, and it is an opportunity to hear yourself and be present to your thoughts: it is your pace, it is your truth, it is your story – however you want to write it – and the ending of each person is very different! (laughs) But it doesn't have an end date, and that is what for me I think is what is never sold per se: it is a journey that never ends. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

Self-reflection is hard work, and requires vulnerability, space and time. Participants spoke about their journeys of discovery as being both inward and outward in order to develop self-awareness. The self-work that Nexus participants experienced provides a strong foundation for leaders. This is more fully explored in the concluding chapter. It might be so for those on Nexus that having to be vulnerable and having to do this hard work creates a feeling of being

forced to, the focus of this next section.

7.2.2 Being forced to

As has been noted before in Chapter 6, the use of the phrases “forced to”, or “thrown against the wall”, metaphors indicating forcible change or transformation such as “being milled”, or “churned” or forced into an action is intriguing because participation in Nexus is voluntary (there are cases where people withdrew from the programme despite being funded by their organisation). In contrast, in other content-driven and classroom-based learning programmes, compulsory actions have more to do with performing tasks that are evaluated such as assignments, examinations or portfolios of evidence.

Several study participants were able to recall, some time after their Nexus year, feelings of being forced to. This forcing to is sometimes attributed to a reified form of Nexus, sometimes to being forced to think differently or challenge beliefs, and sometimes in actions either during Nexus or outside of the programme.

So where does the forcing originate, or which parties are doing the forcing? Carrie, the Nexus facilitator, certainly framed participation in the experiential learning days, use of learning resources and engagements with speakers as invitations into learning:

> After every ELD that we do, I give a list of resources for further exploration … but it’s just an invitation. Then the experiences are an invitation, the kinds of speakers I bring in I think about you know but all of it for me is an invitation and I know that different people will take that invitation in different ways. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Invitation, according to Oxford Dictionaries (2018) is an enticement, an action that seeks to tempt someone into doing something. In the manner in which Carrie used the word ‘invitation’ there was implied choice and opportunity, which stands in stark contrast to the reported sense by Nexus participants of ‘being forced to’.

One way in which Nexus participants may experience ‘being forced to’ came from Carrie’s explanation that the working groups have observers in the initial stages of the programme who challenge the dialogic practices and willingness to demonstrate vulnerability and accountability. The group is invited to reflect on the processes within the dialogue session and to think about how they can take risks, which may feel like they are unwillingly being forced to think and act differently. However, the group remains accountable for the quality of interactions and for the unfolding process of dialogue.

> The first three [working group] sessions they have a … "dialogue guide" so they have a Leon, or a Tozi, or a Quinton or a Rashika who come in and sit with them but don't facilitate. They witness, they observe and then they facilitate 20 minutes at the end saying "Okay, so where didn't you take a risk? What could you have done to deepen your practice of dialogue? What was the question you sat with and you didn't ask? What was the time inside that I saw you going like this (gestures) at some point? What was happening for you?". So they get people to think about how as a group do we take bigger risks, do we expose our vulnerabilities, do we ask the questions that make us kind of choke. And how do we engage in this? So the first three sessions have that guide and then they're on their own. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

Given that in many instances the group deals with matters of identity, fractures in contemporary South Africa, and continuing instances of societal and professional inequalities, it is noteworthy that the responsibility for deepening the understanding of the issues rests within the group. Gunnlaugson (2006) writes about his involvement as a facilitator in generative dialogue sessions: Nexus does not have such an experienced person guiding the dialogue in the working groups.

Another instance of 'being forced to' is seen in the following feedback to a participant about their assignment. Carrie encouraged (not forced) the participant to focus on his or her internal process as she or he practiced one of the tools of dialogue in an assignment.

> While you speak about the context of your listening, and the results, you don't say much about your own internal process. I will not ask you to write more, but I would encourage you to reflect further on what happens inside you as you listen. Does listening come to you as easily as your essay suggests, or are their moments when it is hard for you to listen well? If so, what are those moments? What happens? And what can you do to overcome those challenges? Most of us have both internal and external challenges to listening. It is worth exploring both. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 1_Participant 06)

Sometimes the forcing comes from how people engage with others, particularly during dialogue. In other instances the 'being forced to' is a consequence of completing an assignment as was the case from this participant: "Going through this exercise with Chris forced me to look at my thoughts / beliefs and try to establish how they came into being"

(2015_assignment 1_participant 02). Joe, a recent immigrant into South Africa, spoke about how, through completing a particular assignment, he was able to begin dealing with his prejudice towards Afrikaans speakers in this country.

> Nexus helped me - I have still, but had even more so, a huge prejudice towards Afrikaners as well. I don't know if it just developed since I've been here and the interactions that I've had with Afrikaners has just been really problematic around race. Nexus actually forced me to deal with it, at least start to deal with it. I am still dealing with it. (Joe, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Both Ian and Leazal talked about the change in the quality in their thinking as a result of being forced to participate in dialogue and experiential learning days. Ian used the word 'experience' in the sense of reflecting on his own experiences but also the experience of visiting places during experiential learning days.

> That sort of thinking, in my opinion, is more powerful than the Steven Covey's, where you sit and read a book before you go to bed at night and that is your experience, you are forced into these experiential learnings and these dialogues and whatever else, that's the only way I can make sense of it, why it is different to any other self-help. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

For Ian, the change in the quality of his thinking shifted from being comfortable as an expert and holding knowledge of the matter (epistemological) to a realisation that this technical work was enabled by and through people, an ontological shift.

> And I think Nexus, through its focus on dialogue, through its focus on experience, as a learning tool, it does that; it forces you out of that kind of expertise thinking and into a "I am a human, my deliverables depend on humans" and therefore as people we need to engage better. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

Pravin also found that his thinking changed through dialogue. He noted in his feedback to the group about what he had learnt on Nexus, "It is the conversations we've had. I think it is real. Rather than just nonsense that you may talk with other people it is really real conversations that can change the world or forces you to think differently" (Pravin, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015). For him, the quality of his thinking now had a strong social focus with potential to change the status quo.

Another participant, Niel, also spoke about how he was challenged to do things he did not like

but that this provided opportunity for him to learn. For him, this learning was experimental in its nature.

> We all experimented with something in terms of challenging ourselves. We had to stretch ourselves. There are some things I didn't particularly like, but you had to get through it and learn from it and then move forward. I know there were a lot of people who complained about some of the days, but I think we all had to learn something and we had to experiment something in our learnings and that was key for me. (Niel, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015)

Leazal also felt forced into the process of reflection, a practice new and very uncomfortable to her.

> That forced reflection was a bit annoying at first … I don't meditate or sit and think about what maybe happened in the day … and you are almost forced to do that, there is a discomfort and fidgety feeling. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Whilst it is difficult to make claims about the stability and depth of transformative learning outcomes, especially from reflections of current Nexus participants (assignments and working group) the following three quotes attest to how being forced to has enabled a breadth of learning outcomes: "At times it has felt uncomfortable for me and I have forced myself to go there, to be open to new dimensions in my working relationships and not be afraid of them, I have not yet mastered this but I will" (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 16); or the promise of stability in learning outcomes: "I think this forces you to see beyond that tunnel vision which I don't think any of us have perfected by any stretch of the imagination, but it is something that is consciously there now" (Tebang, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015); or, in the case of Laurie, who was questioning the purpose of her life, an indication of the depth of a transformative learning outcome: "I started thinking about it and I still don't know, but the important thing is I am thinking about it and Nexus forced me to do that, like do you really know what your life's purpose is?" (Laurie, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015). Pierre's comment does indicate that for him, the depth and stability of his transformative learning outcome was fostered through his participation on Nexus: "It forces you on a very, very deep level on your beliefs to change. To me that was the real - it shakes you. It shakes your world a little bit" (Pierre, FGD 1).

Two other quotes point to how participants ascribed 'being forced to' by the Nexus programme itself:

> Because it [Nexus] forced you to go and make up your own mind. Which I kind of enjoyed as well. You know, you have these heated discussions and then you have to figure it out for yourself, which I thought was quite nice. I liked the free nature of those discussions. It wasn't scripted. (Pierre, FGD 1)

> You are here in this moment and you are not going to write an exam about anything but you are here to talk to people in a setting that's not regulated and it's not whatever, so the course in its entirety forces you to – that is the difference, that it forces you – you are this person now, who takes time out of your life to do this. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Van Woerkom (2010, p. 348), citing Taylor (2001), highlights the link between taking risks and the ability to be critically reflective. She writes, "Only when one is able to hold the uncertainty created by the anxiety long enough for risks to be taken is one capable of critical reflection." It is interesting to note the connections between risk-taking, anxiety, and uncertainty could be reported by Nexus participants as being forced to. This can be seen in comments such as those from Niel: "We all experimented with something in terms of challenging ourselves", Leazal: "… you are almost forced to do that, there is a discomfort" and from Participant 16: "At times it has felt uncomfortable for me and I have forced myself to go there, to be open to new dimensions in my working relationships and not be afraid of them."

This dimension of transformative learning requires courage on the part of the person involved in this type of learning. Given that the option to move away from the discomfort is always present for Nexus participants, the question is what enabled them to embrace this form of learning? This may in part be answered by the nature of the relationships formed in Nexus, and the realisation that for many participants there were similar moments of discomfort. This nature of relationships is the focus of the final section of this part of the chapter, section 7.2.5.

In the next section on dialogue I explain in greater detail about how, in generative dialogue, the past, present and future is a source of learning. In the case of South Africa, emerging from the personal and social destruction caused by apartheid's ongoing and continuing fracture lines between different sociocultural groups of people, this source of learning can be very painful and is highly emotive.

7.2.3 Generative dialogue

In the previous chapter I discussed that dialogue is one of the keys used within Nexus to unlock meaning. The other two keys, self-reflection and being forced to, emerged as two other

necessary processes in order to engage with the country's context. These keys provide the means to unlock doors in the many barriers built in a divided past. Dialogue, in the sense of Nexus, is a deliberate practice mutually entered into by all parties and the means of engagement amongst all is made explicit. Using Nexus shorthand, participants described four practices in dialogue as respecting, listening, suspending (judgement) and voicing. (See Appendix 5 for excerpt from 2017 Nexus Guidebook for fuller explanations of these practices.) In coding data from life story interviews, focus group discussions and assignments the most frequent item mentioned was 'listening', then 'suspending' followed by 'voicing'. Participants did not often mention the practice of respect, but often conflated listening and suspending to signify how they demonstrated respect of others.

An additional attitude of vulnerability is also a necessary ingredient to be able to engage in dialogue over highly contentious or complex issues. This is what Bangura (2005, p. 32) notes in ubuntu as being inspired "to expose ourselves to others". Dialogue under these circumstances can be liberating and a means to opening new understanding. Willingness to be vulnerable is one of the 'housekeeping rules' in Nexus that Yadhina referred to in her quote below.

> When we started out I remember Carrie just saying what are some of the housekeeping rules, and trust came out, honesty came out, vulnerability, and openness. And what I experienced specifically in my group was that as time went on, as we trusted each other more, everyone felt more comfortable to be vulnerable and to open. So trust definitely created the safe environment for people to express themselves and to feel comfortable to be vulnerable. Because vulnerability in the workplace is often seen as a weakness, but the way Nexus positions vulnerability is actually that it is not a weakness, it is actually a strength, and that a lot comes out from being vulnerable. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

The notion of vulnerability was used by Nexus participants easily and often, and was seen to act in dialectical relationship with trust. Luleka (Life story, Dec. 5, 2016) described trust as the enabler of vulnerability: "Trust enables you to be vulnerable and share your pain and go into your own shared pain and history." Lexie also supported Luleka's view that trust precedes vulnerability when she said "… that I think creates trust and so to create an environment where people can tell you their deepest, darkest most vulnerable underbelly stuff and not only do you listen to them and appreciate them but it kind of generates a deeper level of connection" (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016). In contrast, Ian's experience was to witness the vulnerability of another Nexus participant which led to the building of trust in his working group. He noted

> My group was lucky, but when the first person presents their story and gives a very heartfelt, very close and private story, it completely opens the floor for everybody else to be able to do the same. Because they have made themselves vulnerable. … I really enjoyed our group. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

The invitation to vulnerability, necessary for honest and open dialogue, or what Gunnlaugson (2006) refers to as generative dialogue, may also link to why participants feel 'forced to'. In the following short interaction during the second focus group discussion, an image of being naked, an inability to avoid vulnerability (you can't duck it), and the extent of vulnerability (you never know HOW vulnerable, emphasis by Leazal) is observed:

> Mandla: First make yourself naked and then pick up whatever garment fits later and then be comfortable in it.
>
> Sammy-Jane: Oh wow. Well said. First you must be vulnerable.
>
> Mandla: Yes, because it [Nexus] creates that vulnerability and you can't duck it.
>
> Leazal: We allude to it but you never know HOW vulnerable.
>
> (FGD2, Feb. 16, 2016)

Vulnerability in Nexus can be experienced through exposure of what is felt as personal weaknesses within the group. In this extract from an assignment, participant 11 'poked' at his own deeply felt vulnerability:

> I have been uncertain that I can do it… this is my fear, my place of vulnerability. This leads to my assignment in which I would test the limits of my vulnerability- exposing my weaknesses to these Nexus people!!! … (i.e.: Nexus got me to start, but I didn't just do it for my assignment, I did it for me, to poke my vulnerability!). (Assignment 3 Participant 11)

Vulnerability could be seen as an acknowledgment of one's deep-seated discontent. Mezirow (1981) describes one of the phases in transformative learning as "relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues recognizing that one's problem is shared and not exclusively a private matter." This happens under a process Mezirow named constructive discourse: "Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action

decision based on the resulting insight" (Mezirow, 2000b, pp. 7-8). However, Gunnlaugson (2006), building on the work of Isaacs (1993, 1996) and Scharmer (2000) describes the means of effecting collective transformative learning through a process of generative dialogue. Generative dialogue, according to Gunnlaugson, has four characteristics: it is a discipline of lifelong learning and practice; is informed by the past, present and future; the dialogic process follows a developmental course; and finally it requires meta-awareness, not thought and feeling, to reign supreme (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 14). Gunnlaugson (2007) holds that generative dialogue can result in transformative learning, and that the process of generative dialogue includes "meta-awareness, vision-logic, multiple intelligences, multiple ways of knowing, suspension and presencing" (p. 147). The lens of generative dialogue is used to interpret the data in this section.

Nexus participants do not experience dialogue in the ways Mezirow (2000b) describes it, as a constructive discourse with its more rational and cognitive focus on assessment of reasons to justify their assumptions. Their descriptions of dialogue include more holistic ways of knowing through a willingness to be vulnerable and to embrace practices of meta-awareness through suspending judgement, respecting the other person in dialogue and listening deeply. As dialogue in Nexus is enacted participants report both on their emotional responses and also an awareness of the emotions raised within the group. It is for this reason that the data are engaged with using Gunnlaugson's (2006) generative dialogue as described above.

The purpose of dialogic learning (Rule, 2015) is to deepen understanding of the complex issues, a search for a dependable, defensible best explanation. According to Mezirow (2012, p. 79) it becomes imperative to actively look for viewpoints that challenge prevailing norms, although Mezirow also advocated for consensus-building. Rule (2015) defines 'allosensus' as the process of maintaining a diversity of different viewpoints accompanied by respect for the views of others. Dialogue, as practiced and understood by Nexus participants, follows Rule's allosensus rather than consensus.

In Leazal's quote below we see both breadth and stability of learning outcomes, and also note that she is committed to the lifelong learning and practice of generative dialogue when she said that she still carries with her the practices of voicing and active listening. These two practices occur in her marriage and with friends, as well as work, thus signifying breadth of learning outcomes.

> There was also a very powerful growth within me that had nothing really to do with any of those elements [race and leadership], it had to do with voicing at work, and in my marriage, in my social life, and then the opposite of that – active listening, I wasn't actively listening to anything, I just thought I was. Those two elements became really powerful … I say sometimes I feel I have learnt some of the stuff after Nexus, and maybe some elements not, but definitely voicing and active listening I have carried with me. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Ian endorsed Gunnlaugson's (2006, p. 12) view that "the dialogue process unfolds in a developmental fashion." His recollection told of an uncovering of the underlying story of prejudice encountered during a working group session and he described it as "hard dialogue" and hard work. He also noted that this process needs time, which concurs with Gunnlaugson's metaphor of unfolding.

> So that was a complete shift in my thinking, to say, "Well what is the back story behind the prejudice you hear and see?" And I think that personally was a big aspect of it for me, because it was - you really had to dig hard to get there. [Interviewer: Dig hard afterwards?] No, no – during. So when we first started discussing it you get this immediate push back, like "No" – and the work to go from "No" to actually "Why?" was hard work. It was not like people were crying or fighting but it was hard dialogue to get there. We managed it in an evening, so it wasn't like it took us weeks. But you don't have that time with everyone you meet, and so often the conflicts that flare up in the workplace or at home are because of these like two end points, a prejudice and a view that clash, and you fight about the prejudice versus the view, and you never either have or take the time to understand "Where did that actually come from?" (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

That generative dialogue has temporal sources of learning, the past, present and future, is the grease that makes the wheels of dialogue in Nexus turn. The raison d'être for Nexus is to explore how South Africa's past continues to impact the present and what it means for the future. This temporal structure is made obvious to all participants in this leadership programme. South Africa's apartheid history and dire ongoing social and economic inequality increases the complexity of issues that need to be dealt with by leaders. References to apartheid, either as a lived experience or understood vicariously, predominate throughout the data. Apartheid is situated in the past, but the ongoing hurt and fracture is a present reality.

Isaacs notes that the processing of images or information happens in one of two forms: reflective, which is memory-based, or proprioceptive, which is an "awareness of what one is doing as one is doing it" (Isaacs, 1996, p. 24). In developing proprioceptive awareness, Gunnlaugson (2006, p. 11) notes that "we learn how to break out of the solipsistic representational world of images, meaning and thought which originate from past experience." No wonder that Mandla was able to answer my question about being vulnerable whilst engaging in dialogue with the answer, "You feel liberated" (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

What is interesting to note about the development of proprioceptive awareness, is that Nexus participants became aware of what they were doing whilst they were doing it in a physical sense too: the experiential learning journeys acted as a catalyst for critical reflection and dialogue during the working groups. Sammy-Jane said:

> It's just so rich, you are having your own experience, you are talking to Leon and to Carrie, "Can you believe this?", maybe you were slightly outraged, then they give you time, you drive in from somewhere … by the time you get into the dialogue room and they are pouring wine and you are like, "I need to tell you guys stuff", you are so ready to unload … it's firstly awareness and then identification and then it is the processing of the information, one way or another and then deciding what to do next, consciously deciding "OK, now that I know this, now what?" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

This description by Sammy-Jane of the richness of her learning on Nexus contained elements of going through an experience, emotions ("outrage", "ready to unload") being foregrounded in attempts to make sense of what she had seen and felt, and then deepening her understanding of the matter so that she could take informed action. Her use of the term "dialogue room" is also interesting: there is a sense of dialogic space that she knew was part of her learning and that would assist her to "process the information".

The fourth characteristic of generative dialogue is the ability to expand different ways of knowing through meta-awareness. Gunnlaugson (2006, p. 21) puts it this way, "Adopting an embodied meta-aware position facilitates ways of holding our personal perspectives lightly, in turn developing receptivity to difference, which in the context of multicultural diversity and our complex world is increasingly needed." Carrie, in her feedback to a participant on his or her assignment 'Dialogue in the workplace', explained in plain language how meta-awareness is the ability to both participate in dialogue as well as to observe and be aware of the various moves in a conversation. She likened this capacity to at times being a listener, or to being aware of the need to suspend judgment, or to respect or give voice like the steps one takes in

a dance in response to the music that is being played. She wrote:

> All the time, we need to be conscious of where we need to listen, to respect, to suspend and to voice. It is a kind of dance. In dance, you listen to the music and respond to it. With these practices, you listen to the music of the conversation and do the same. It's as if you are a participant and an observer at the same time. One part of you steps back and keeps asking, "What is needed from me now to best serve this conversation?" This came through clearly in your third example where your questions were not simply to serve your, but deeply served the group, your shared understanding and your shared goal. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 2_participant 08)

Lerushka also described her developing meta-awareness and acceptance of other ways of knowing:

> It wasn't just the mind. Nexus didn't just engage the mind, it challenged the mind, it challenged your assumptions. You would go home sometimes and try and figure out why you are feeling how you are feeling after and you can't put your finger on it. … You've got to spend time actually thinking about it. The next time you are sitting in a meeting … and you get the same feeling and you are like, "I've felt that before, what is that?" And so just being able to reflect and build yourself as a person. (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Isaacs (1996, p. 21) writes, "The process of dialogue seems to enable shifts in the very ground on which people stand, transforming and expanding their sense of self, and deepening their capacity to hear and inquire into perspectives vastly different than their own." For Lerushka this expanded sense of self meant that she has become aware of the building process of self, but also that, in the moment she became aware of feelings she had encountered before, a meta-awareness in which she noted that her emotions became the focus of her meaning-making efforts.

Gunnlaugson (2006, p. 21) argues that generative dialogue supports transformative learning outcomes, but furthermore is the necessary means to develop "capacities to sense, presence and enact emerging ways of knowing, being and learning that are needed to flourish in our complex age." Data gleaned in this study support his argument that for some participants in the Nexus programme there are expanded ways of knowing, being and learning.

> Sometimes you can say now we are adult, Nexus assists you, even in the manner in which some of those interactions are handled, you don't have somebody to sit there and moderate what you are saying and tell you, "No, don't do that." The group ends up taking a whole autonomy of having the session to be successful and you take it up upon yourself, because remember you are getting no marks, you are getting nothing basically that you have to show anyone for it, other than that experience you will take with you. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Nexus participants, through applying the tools of dialogue and trying on vulnerability, are able to engage in generative dialogue. This developmental process increases trust amongst participants which in turn increases the willingness to be vulnerable. In such a way, holistic ways of knowing and making-meaning are embraced. Generative dialogue acknowledges the necessity of both emotions and relationships in order to explore complex and contested matters.

The next section discusses the ways that self-reflection also supports new ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology) and learning. Although many transformative learning theorists have shown the strong role that emotions play in this kind of learning, what stands out in this research is the matter-of-fact reporting by Nexus participants about the powerful role of emotions in their learning, and the natural acceptance of this form of learning.

7.2.4 Emotions

Many participants in this research made reference to the visit to Vlakplaas. In Chapter 6 I provided detail about the history and significance of Vlakplaas, but for many South Africans it is a singular reminder of the atrocities carried out by the apartheid government in order to quell the rising anti-apartheid movement. Access to the Vlakplaas site is limited and sometimes difficult to arrange and few people have had exposure to Vlakplaas. The visit to Vlakplaas, if it happens, is part of the experiential learning day that explores South Africa's past, and reflections by participants are almost exclusively couched in emotive terms. Pierre and Avinash, in the same focus group discussion, made the link between the destructive forces under apartheid and their experiences at Vlakplaas. It is in grappling with the residual effects of apartheid that emotions come to the fore and enable participants to begin to understand the meaning of apartheid in different ways:

> Very interesting emotions after that Vlakplaas day. I remember people crying there from what they heard. I remember that standout one of how they said they were burning this one guy's body and they had a braai [barbeque] … That like hit us in tears. Then you have a group that you are mixed so you have Black people and White people. Some are feeling very hurt and others are feeling very ashamed to be associated with that. Those are the emotions that you come out from there. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

> The hair on the end of my neck still [stands] - when I talk about Vlakplaas ... There is a funny vibe there. Then we came back and they say, "Just talk." Jeez and guys just talk … Doing Nexus I realised … it is apartheid legacy issues. It is a very emotional discussion. It brings out lots of emotions from all sides …There are multiple angles to get to the truth of that matter and it is a lot more tricky and complicated than what people think. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Under the new government, Vlakplaas is locked and there is no clarity yet about how to manage the place. There is a caretaker, and the site is well maintained but it appears abandoned because there are no people to be seen there. Pierre described Vlakplaas as having a "funny vibe", Ian remembered its "weird sense", and Luleka as symbolic of pain.

> Going to - what is that terrible farm -? [Interviewer: Vlakplaas] Yes – that weird sense you get there – there was no one [living] there but it was still an odd place … it really got you. You couldn't escape the feeling that you got from that day, it was "What has brought us to where we are now?" – and I think what was really interesting as well was the way that very different cultural groups actually built respect for the classical opposite per se. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016).

> He convinced me to be part of Nexus, because … it was the second time being exposed to the Afrikaner, what we felt strongly that it was Afrikaner driven, the pain – Vlakplaas … symbolised carrying that pain … it was an opportunity to now look at "So how differently can one react?" And just being with peers who were just breaking down, being in the space of Vlakplaas. So it brought that pain, and in the past one would have reacted from a space of anger and all that. And I thought this was a second chance, this was giving me a second chance in life, in dealing with the wounded-ness of society. And Nexus helped me, because at that point I knew I was not capable of assisting, because I myself was wounded. If I still was affected by this pain to this extent, but at this stage I knew that an eye for an eye has not worked for me, and I don't want to go that route, but what route is there? What alternative? So I chose to strengthen self, I chose to go within and to work on self, so that I think I could [be] in that strong space and centred space … but I knew it would be transformative to me and to the people, for perpetrator/victim it would be a completely different approach that one, because I would have worked with my pain and ja, just shifting my mind-set in terms of how I see people. (Luleka, Life Story, Dec 5, 2016)

Vlakplaas acts as a catalyst for eliciting strong emotions, but also as an entry point for Nexus participants to acknowledge the power of emotions in their learning. For Luleka the link between her emotions of pain were strongly linked to the transformation of her meaning structures. Luleka participated in Nexus some ten years before this interview and her ability to recall the transformation supports Hoggan's (2016a, 2016b) argument regarding the stability of transformation over time. In addition, Luleka's comments about choosing to go within and work on self reflected depth of learning. Her comment about "perpetrator/victim" references the brutality and violence she witnessed and experienced under apartheid. In the action of strengthening herself she was able to redefine her relationship as victim with those she used to see as perpetrators: quite powerfully she spoke of a transformed relationship through "shifting [her] mind-set in terms of how [she saw] people". The breadth of transformative learning outcomes through working through her pain meant she was able to broaden her meaning-structures in such a way as to include those she previously classified as "perpetrators" in her life.

Another aspect of learning that emerges from embracing the role of emotions is in acknowledging our full humanity. Carrie, in feedback on a participant's written assignment, commented as follows:

> For all of the experiences we feel shame or embarrassment about in our lives. We are human – and our experiences and emotions are not unique to us. As we are able to open up and share more of what we hide, we liberate others who are sitting in silence. Who are nursing pain or shame or blame. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 3_Participant 17)

In this way emotions are able to open the participant up to deal with hidden parts of their life's experiences, but it is in this action of claiming the full range of emotions, that those who are part of the dialogue can also be liberated. In this next quote, Tebang spoke about how difficult it was for him to overcome the suppression of his emotions because of his sociocultural upbringing:

> I think you guys will all remember when I told you a story of how it is when you are a Zulu black guy. You are meant to be strong. You can't be fragile in front of people. You can't show weakness. You can't show emotion. I think going through this course some of the stuff that we were exposed to as a group, some of the people you saw, I don't care how hard you were you could not not crumble inside. You guys saw an individual like Boss crying. I went on the same journey. I have learnt to become comfortable with being fragile ... accepting emotion, accepting life as it comes to you or even the emotions that you need to, to get through it and obviously learning from that as well. (Tebang, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015)

In expressing emotions Tebang equated this with weakness, but for him there was a breakthrough in being comfortable with his emotions. In a powerful comment he spoke of the learning that came from accepting his emotions.

Avinash recounted a story that someone in his working group shared with the group. He connected with the storyteller but also acknowledged the impact on emotions that other group members may have experienced.

> What is that person also going through in them because they know in their lives, that emotion when you hear another person's story? There was a story that we cried about what one girl went through in there. If I was going through this then what are others going through? (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016)

For Sammy-Jane the power of having her emotions validated meant that she could accept the emotions felt by others and she felt that the ensuing authenticity led to a form of emotions that

she called “ease within the group”.

> Because Nexus makes everything valid, everything valid, your experiences valid, your emotions are valid, so too everybody else’s, there is a sort of ease that settles in the group so easily that nothing is trite anymore. (Sammy-Jane, FGD, Feb. 24, 2016)

Two participants reflected on how they had come to terms with the role of their emotions in helping them to navigate through difficulties at work. Yadhina, as part of a Nexus assignment, reflected about her feelings in preparation, during and after a meeting at her place of work. These reflections led her to the realisation that fear suppresses her ability to lead and to make contributions in meetings. In the quote following Yadhina’s, Lerushka was able to use the feelings that surfaced in having her assumptions challenged during a Nexus session, to later help her navigate her way in meetings. She linked an ability to name her emotions to familiar emotions she experienced whilst participating in Nexus, but more importantly to own the validity of her feelings as a means for personal development.

> The writing up of the work actually caused you to experiment with it at work and then write down and capture those emotions of how it made you feel, and what was your experience doing it? And before doing it how did you prepare for it, and whilst you were in it, how did you manage it, and afterwards like how do you feel? ... Sometimes fear gets the better of you, and it stifles your leadership ability because you move from being perceived as this quiet non-contributor, to challenging your own self and actually contribute in sessions. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

> It wasn’t just the mind. Nexus didn’t just engage the mind, it challenged the mind, it challenged your assumptions. You would go home sometimes and try and figure out why you are feeling how you are feeling after, and you can’t put your finger on it. … You’ve got to spend time actually thinking about it. The next time you are sitting in a meeting … and you get the same feeling and you are like, “I’ve felt that before, what is that?” And so just being able to reflect and build yourself as a person. (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

Lerushka’s reflections support Taylor’s (2001) findings that emotions are the rudder of rational meaning-making, and that memory is acted on in active, nonconscious ways. Taylor (2001, p. 234) writes:

> Reviewing contemporary studies from the field of neuroscience and psychology, feelings are found to be the rudder for reason, without which it wanders aimlessly with little or no bearing in the process of making decisions. Also, research on memory reveals an active and nonconscious cognitive process that has been found to have a significant influence on how we make meaning of the world around us.

In Nexus, participants explore the past and present through experiential learning days, and so experience a physical setting for their learning. Opportunities are created for first-hand witnessing of how emotions physically play out amongst the participants. In a fairly natural setting (learning through experiential days) participants have new spaces for exploration via the affective domain opened to them. For some participants, being in physical spaces such as Vlakplaas, the Voortrekker Monument, Johannesburg's inner city, the townships of Alexandra, Diepsloot or Soweto surface feelings of hurt, anger and sometimes an unconscious realisation of guilt or discomfort at the past and present.

The knowledge that sense-making will also happen through self-reflection and later in dialogue opens participants to an understanding of why there may be emotional responses in this process. Respondents in this research openly expressed their reflections about their emotional responses during Nexus and, apart from one life story interviewee, did not apologise for expressing emotions or recalling their feelings on Nexus during data collection.

In the ability to embrace learning through and with emotions, participants are using more intuitive and emotional ways of knowing, what Dirkx (1997, p. 83) refers to as soul learning. For Dirkx, soul is authentic, and represents connections between heart and mind, mind and emotions, as embedded in the concreteness of everyday experiences. Nexus nurtures the soul because it provides space for these connections to be made, and opportunities for emotions to be expressed.

According to Dirkx, soul work, or inner work, is an invitation for the soul to express itself, where emotions provide a language to help understand the relationship between the individual and the broader world. Lawrence summarised his 'Nexus story' entirely in terms of the emotional turmoil he felt, but that he has now come to a point of contentment.

> It is the world, but then there is my truth and there is me. And this brand 'me' I am working on, and ja, I think it [the process on Nexus] is an emotional roller coaster that makes you feel content, at the end of the day. So that for me I think is my Nexus story. (Lawrence, Life story, Nov. 30, 2016)

The role of emotions in learning in Nexus is notable. Emotions serve to provoke reflection and learning, and often shape the learning that takes place in Nexus. The role of emotions in learning is acknowledged, and storytelling is deliberately used as a means of unlocking the felt experiences of participants. Integral to our very humanity is the ability to connect with the emotions of others, and here Carrie highlighted other ways of knowing (you can feel them in your body)

> In Nexus one of the main things we use is stories. Because you can argue forever with someone's opinion I mean it's a no-brainer right and that's what we constantly tell people "Go to the experience that gave people the opinion, don't try and argue the opinion. Go to the story." Because the story: this happened to me, you can argue with my interpretation of it, but this happened to me, you feel it you can imagine it because we're all human you can imagine the humiliation, the pride, the sense of challenge, whatever it is. Those are generic emotions right and you can feel them in your body and then you know, and all of a sudden you know you have compassion for that person. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015).

Leon also acknowledged that emotions are present in learning on Nexus, and likened learning through emotion to femininity, contrasting it with the masculinity of rational learning.

> Thanks to Nexus … people get in touch with their emotional side, their 'female side' if you like, because I find that people generally speaking don't want to expose themselves, to expose their emotional side to everybody, because they are not in touch with that side. And we find that people really engage with all facets of their being. (Leon, Interview, Oct. 22, 2015)

Jadey was part of the management team for Nexus. In her first year as coordinator for the programme she was both 'participant' and organiser in experiential learning days. Her experiences in these dual roles provide a useful insight into how learning events are planned on Nexus. In the first paragraph we hear how her visit to a park where Nexus participants meet and talk to drug addicts, and the ensuing distress raised high levels of emotions in Jadey. She reflected on what other participants may also be feeling because of this visit, but for Jadey the meaning-making of this event and implications for setting up ELDs only began to get resolved through a dialogic interaction with Carrie and Leon and her manager, Phyllis. The resolution was to more carefully frame the visit and to warn Nexus participants of the feelings and distress that could be evoked. Participation in such events therefore became optional.

> To speak a little bit Viv on how that affected me the first time I went. … you are just so distraught after that, it just sits, it sits with you for days and days and days and you don't understand - is it something you need to do? Is it … How could this be happening? And you know so freely … So it sits with you and you just don't know how to process it to the point … When I came back I came to Phyllis [Jadey's manager]: "I can't … why did we do this? Like why would we put anybody through this? … We try to prepare them [the delegates] more and because you also don't know what a delegate's situation is, whether there's a family member that's been through something like that, so in terms of our briefing we've been a little more direct about what they need to accept and if they're not comfortable they, you know, can tell us if they prefer to skip that part of the visit.
>
> [Phyllis] really considered what I was saying because she was like she doesn't get it either: "Let's cut it out you know, let's replace it with something else, it's just too traumatic for people." Through lots of talking with Leon and Carrie … in hindsight for me I'm glad we haven't decided to cut it out so she [Phyllis] considered it for a long time and we had lots of discussions with the rest of the team on how we can you … better equip them for the visit and that's what we've done. (Jadey, Interview, Oct. 6, 2015)

So whilst there is acknowledgement with the Nexus management team that emotions play a role in learning, and that sometimes the emotions that can be provoked need to be more carefully handled and scaffolded, there is an absence in the data about a deliberate strategy to bring emotions into learning. Reference to emotions are expressed in words and phrases such as "challenged" or "being taken out of a comfort zone". Certainly there is an assumption that the telling of personal stories is imbued with emotions, and that stories are not collections of facts but rather carry the emotions of lived experiences within them.

7.2.5 Nature of relationships

This section is divided into two parts built around how participants have reported on their discoveries on Nexus about the human-ness of other participants on Nexus. Race has a particularly strong focus in this discovery, more so than the influence of gender, class, sector of employment, cultural or religious groupings. The first part focuses on reflections by participants on apartheid's dehumanisation project, and the lingering effects on the nature of relationships between race or culture groups. In the next section a re-humanising process in Nexus is explored. Participants reported on two ways in which they were re-humanised during

Nexus: firstly, apartheid's deliberate separation of various racial and cultural groupings into those deemed more or less valuable in society was disrupted through dialogue and reflection, and the nature of relationships between different racial and cultural groups was redefined; and secondly, interactions with groups of people against whom anger or prejudice was held were changed through the realisation that at the level of individuals from that class of persons, stereotypes fall away. Research participants used phrases such as "realise how similar we are as human beings", or "you realised they are just another person like you."

Two quotes, in which reference is made to the dehumanisation that took place under apartheid, introduce this part. Both these quotes were made by White research participants, and they reflect their awareness of how, in dehumanising others, it becomes possible to carry out actions that in hindsight are highly questionable. Ian asked, "What system allowed you to dehumanise that person sufficiently that you could do what you did, because if you saw that person as a human there is no way anyone could do that?" (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016). For Lexie, her view was that

> the core project of apartheid was to completely dehumanise people because it is only when you dehumanise people that can you make decisions about them like that. And then to brainwash a whole group of people to believe, to hold the same position. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

Of all the six people who were interviewed for their life story, only one, Luleka, a Black woman, is old enough to have experienced first-hand the brutality associated with apartheid, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the last angry and violent death throes of the apartheid system. Here she provides two reflections that provide insight into the lived experiences of apartheid. In the first she reflected on how at one level there was an unconscious acceptance of dehumanisation under apartheid, but also that there was a conscious rejection of seeing herself as a "nothing" and a reframing of her meaning structures to develop a sense of self-worth and her own worthiness in the face of accepted sociocultural norms.

> Whether they call you a kaffir [derogatory word that signifies enormous insult], a woman or … you know in terms of how they degrade women – you have to consent to that unless, if you don't, then it will not touch you. But if you somehow in your system you do believe it, whether subconsciously or consciously, this is when it does affect you … one has come across systems that have attempted to do that to a large extent, or put you in a place where you were degraded, and a nothing. You know it tells you that you are

> absolutely nothing, you are an animal or sub-human and this and this – and for you to come out and say, "No way, I am worthy, I am somebody." (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

The language she associated with her former oppression is that of Afrikaans (she said Afrikaans was the language she heard the police using in quelling the violence in the townships). During the first years under the new democratic state she was employed in the government sector, and there had to work with Afrikaans speakers, but more particularly with those who had once held power over her. This was her first professional and collaborative encounter with Afrikaners, and it proved to be a highly contested relationship. She was invited to join Nexus, and she said:

> For me there was a reconciliatory element to it … So when I came [to Nexus I] still had … you know Afrikaners for me was still a big issue. My interaction and relationship with Afrikaners in general and how I saw them. Going to those places [during experiential learning days] at first it brought out anger but … even before I did the work I realised it had to be people who were wounded who could create such pain and such systems and so for me it was very healing. It brought reconciliation on a personal level and also with my fellow Afrikaners I could now look at them and see them as people and step into … maybe think of what they could have been going through here or whatever was happening for them to actually create such a system and be okay with it … So it helped me in that way. (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

In confronting her anger with this group of people, she began a process of humanising those who had been responsible for her dehumanisation. Her forgiveness started with a recognition of the woundedness that permitted the creation of the apartheid system, and an acknowledgement of the pain felt throughout by all. Her re-humanising can be seen where she reported on her own healing, her naming of those she previously rejected as "fellow" Afrikaners, and in her willingness to step into their lives.

Nexus provides opportunities for exploration of the divided past of South Africa under apartheid, and the destructive human forces that supported this enforced separation. Lexie's use of "brainwashing" in an earlier paragraph speaks to the sometimes unconscious acceptance of the 'truth' of apartheid, and of a new sense that has since emerged under democracy.

I now explore how relationships between formerly separated groups of people are disrupted and redefined during Nexus. Another feature of this re-humanising process is that not all

people who belong to a particular group are stereotyped: individuals are seen as being distinct from a common understanding of the group. For Joe, meeting with an Afrikaans speaking person for a fairly lengthy engagement in order to complete a Nexus assignment, allowed him to view people as individuals and not as representatives of a group of people.

> I don't actually remember what the assignment was but I think it was to actually meet with someone that you wouldn't normally meet with and just talk to them for a period of time. I asked our HR Director, who is Afrikaner, if I could meet with her brother who is this traditional boere [Afrikaans word for farmer] kind of guy. I met up with him three different times just to have lunch and chatted to him about his life and outlook on South Africa. It definitely helped just to get me thinking more around individuals rather than groups and that everyone has a different story to tell. (Joe, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

In this quote from an assignment by an anonymous participant, the willingness to engage with someone not typically included by them brings to light the joy of building relationships. "Human connection is a beautiful thing. There are so many lessons that you can learn from people that you don't usually engage with and sometimes it results in beautiful connections which is something that I believe all humans long for" (2015_Assignment 1_Participant 02). For Sammy-Jane there was release from having to create barriers to avoid engaging with an entire group. This realisation helped her own re-humanisation process.

> I can't be this person who is out to randomly hating an entire group of people because of all these slights that really has nothing to do with people, with who this person is, and all it does is that it creates these barriers … all these reasons and excuses to not be human with each other. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Carrie supported the contention that at the level of the individual, changed relationships could create new connections, a new way of being in the world:

> There are few more important contributions you could make to the future of South Africa than continuing to experiment with how we can create shared spaces differently. This will not be done at the level of grand theories. It will be done by people like you who have the courage to test out new ways of being, new patterns of connection, new ways to enact respect; respect not only for cultural and religious beliefs and practices, but for all beliefs and practices and ways of being. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 3_ Participant 13)

In further feedback to another participant on their assignment Carrie highlighted that it was through challenging prejudices and deeply-held assumptions that the barriers between groups of people could be broken down. She wrote:

> I sense a deep passion for finding ways to cross the bridges that divide us as South Africans. For finding ways to challenge our assumptions and judgements about one another so that we can put our energy into creating the shared future that we all long for" (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_ Assignment 3_Participant 15).

Ian and Avinash linked the removal of prejudice and judgement with a process of humanising of the other. In the curiosity to understand the source of prejudice in the other, Ian suspended his judgement with a resulting humanisation of that person.

> You see the prejudice, but you always then have to think, "Where has that actually come from?" What has really created that? And for me it humanises the person, because even the most prejudiced person has, they are like that for a reason … and it does give you a deeper sense of empathy for everyone – me in particular. So I think up until then I could be very, very quick to judge and I think I learned to withhold that judgement – ideally eliminate it, but at least withhold it until you have had that time to understand. If you don't have the time to understand then certainly don't judge; you can't. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

For Avinash, he became aware of his own prejudice, perhaps as a consequence of his upbringing, through the process of listening deeply and without judgement.

> Then the next person says something and you don't comment on all of it, you just hold it in but everyone just humanises each other … you were breaking down the boundaries and you were starting to see the person as a human also, but they was coming from a different experience and they viewed from a different lens. … that check in was very important to break down whatever tension, whatever perceptions you have, because you could easily come in with the perception of that person from what you were brought up with but now you are hearing their story and you are hearing something else and it breaks your perception and then you realised that they are just another person like you. (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016)

The use of the concept 'humanising' by many Nexus participants is worth noting. The notion of 'humanising' does not appear in the guidebook at all, and in only one reading (Chapter 2 of Block (2001)) are the concepts 'human connection', 'being a human being' and 'humanity' mentioned. The language of Nexus participants is infused with phrases such as "humanise", "human beings", "humanness", "I/we are humans", "not sub-human", "not human with each other" and "human connection that all humans long for". So while it appears that 'humanising' is not part of the 'official' Nexus discourse, certainly it forms part of 'Nexus-speak' used by participants.

Luleka found that humanising the Other emerged in the sharing of stories. She pointed out that there are emotional and relational ways of knowing that arise out of hearing the story of another person. During my interview with her I experienced a sense of that re-humanising: it was the first time I had heard first-hand of the level of violence that characterised the life of someone who is a similar age to me. We grew up a distance of 20 kilometres apart and yet our worlds are so very different. I expressed my shock at the extent of the brutality in her formative years, but also said that I had no idea of that lived experience. Luleka's acknowledgement of my lived experience was a moment of re-humanising for me.

> Stories … brings the raw emotions, it brings the human element when people start telling their stories, their humanness emerges and you can see it …I find it very spiritual actually. It takes us to another dimension where we tell our stories from the heart … To hear stories from different sides. Like we are talking now, it is the first time you really hear my story … the closeness to violence. But I also could hear that you were protected from that, you never knew that. So for me to accuse you of "you didn't take action" …the thing is that sometimes people were not aware of what was happening. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

It was very surprising to me to hear about how close to violence Luleka's life was because she had a great peace and calmness about her. The reflections of this participant also foregrounded the limitations of assumptions made about the life of another: "I have learnt many times during the Nexus programme what you see is certainly not what you get and that your assumptions truly limit you from gaining a broader understanding of another human being and life" (2015_ Assignment 1_Participant 03). Lexie, through her exploring of the lives of others, found joy in connecting. She said:

> Nexus gave me that, it gave me new lenses, it gave me people to converse with, it gave me an opportunity to speak to people in a very human way …So it's to have the difficult conversations but in a space that allows you to just really enjoy each other as human beings. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

For Luleka and Leazal, the sharing in the stories and experiences of the Other, the stepping into the shoes of another in a deep and authentic way, the recognition that there is a common understanding of human vulnerability, removed barriers caused by fear and socialised differences.

> In the sharing, in the exploring of who we are we realise that we have similar journeys. They may have happened in different contexts but soon we realise how similar we are as human beings – our vulnerabilities and things – and how we are shaped … And pain, when we share our pain … there is a connecting that happens when we share our pain, and maybe it is that vulnerable space that we get into, that reminds us of our humanity. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

> That is one of the powerful things of Nexus, sort of stepping into someone else's shoes, but not on a surface level, like honestly doing it. It's almost like people become human, going into Alex, going to parts of the CBD where you would not normally go to. It's like you see people as people in opposed to something that I am supposed to be scared of, because everyone says that, I should not go there. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Sammy-Jane also found that she stopped fearing the Other because of her realisation that all people want the same things for themselves and for those they love. She used the word "commonalising" to signify how similar all people are in their wishes and desires, and it is this commonalising that breaks down barriers between people, and gives courage to interact with others. However, she spoke about confronting herself in order to attain this realisation, another

indication of the sense of being forced to.

> The process of confronting myself and seeing myself sort-of plainly neither a good guy nor a bad guy, just this individual … the process or the privilege of seeing other people similarly, neither a good guy or bad guy … you don't fear people anymore. We are all motivated by the same things, we want to feel love and we want to be appreciated … so there is this commonalising of life that removes barriers, barriers where you saw barriers before … we are all people, we want to go home to people who love us, we want to feel appreciated at work, we want to do good work, we want an opportunity to show our talents, it's just simple, it is really simple, we want to rear our children in protected and safe environments. We have dreams for the future, we have things that we regret, it is this commonalising that gives you great courage. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Leazal, in the same focus group session as Sammy-Jane, described the commonalising experience, as a self-help process through people, notably through connection.

> Your connection with your fellow human beings. … I am not - my experiences are not so isolated that Mandla can't understand it, that Sammy can't understand it, it's self-help but through other people … it really is self-help through connecting, through connecting with other people … which I think in South Africa is more important than anything, and it's the only way we can move forward. (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The key task of apartheid was to enforce the differences between people of different races, to maintain and promote disconnection. Leazal's statement was that in Nexus she saw the existence of connection to others, and so realised the undoing of apartheid-forced disconnection. Furthermore, this connection also recognises meaningful relationships with each other ('your fellow human beings').

In his early review of the literature on transformative learning theory Taylor (1997) noted that

> Few of these studies explored the practice of fostering transformative learning in relationship to the participants' cultural background. They offered a universal process to fostering transformative learning that discounts difference based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity and failed to recognize the impact of the positionality of marginalized groups in the classroom experience" (Taylor, 1997, p. 15).

The “cultural background” and marginalising mentioned by Taylor is at the heart of the relationships that are transformed during the time of Nexus. Apartheid segregated people on the basis of their race and today the word ‘culture’ often stands as proxy for this notion. In addition, the groups formerly marginalised through legislation - Black, Coloured and Indian people - under apartheid now have to deal with post-apartheid White people who claim the same experience of feeling marginalised. Lexie noted that her experience on the programme was that “Nexus just opened the door for me to learn about other people in the most fascinating way … This kind of butting heads along old traditional divisions is not going to get us anywhere” (Lexie, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).

In this quote by Mandla, he spoke about his revised relationships amongst the different races. Whereas before he ascribed his perception of the Other as being aloof, through his experiences on Nexus he now goes through a process of breaking down his perceptions and of recognising the human in the Other.

> You get to understand my country is basically like this, and my fellow people are like this, whether Black or White, they are struggling with these things or they have these experiences which sometimes you think some people are aloof, meanwhile they are protecting their vulnerabilities and you will look at it and think, “That one does not want to talk to people, he is aloof or whatever” but if you get into that space it breaks all those things down, you will see a person for what or who he is. (Mandla, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

This ability to break down barriers between groups of people previously destructively divided under apartheid brought about a process of reconciliation for Luleka. She said:

> Also the reconciliatory aspect that I spoke about. By the time I left I think that hatred towards Afrikaners had changed completely. Not that I love them but I was willing to engage and get to know them better as people and human beings rather than as Afrikaners who were cruel and all of that. … We are just human beings. We are beautiful and special each one of us. Each one of us has something to give. When we engage beyond colour and race and gender and all that there is a richness that you find that you can’t find anywhere else. I can’t say Nexus did that, but it was the beginning of something big. (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

In Chapter 2 I briefly discussed the concept of African humanism, ubuntu, (Gaylard, 2004) drawing on the definition offered by Bangura (2005, p. 31) which is “a unifying vision or

worldview enshrined in the maxim "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*": i.e. 'a person is a person through other persons'". Ubuntu thus accepts that identity and becoming can only happen through other persons. Ubuntu holds that in relationships there is a shift from solitariness to solidarity, independence to interdependence and individuality with regard to community to individuality in community. For Luleka, being able to recognise the beauty, uniqueness and generosity inherent in all exemplified ubuntu, as manifest in the changed nature of her relationships, particularly with the Other.

7.3 Bringing it altogether

In Figure 11 a model of the different spaces in which learning takes place was presented. In the Nexus space participants, through a process of generative dialogue, critical self-reflection and being forced to, encounter other participants from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. Relationships of trust are built in the presence of emotions. This space of safety in Nexus allows Nexus participants to step out into the South African context space and to more deeply explore their meaning-making of this country. The country context, of which Nexus is a microcosm, is marred by lines of fracture and deep divisions and mistrust, but also there is hope and possibility for a co-created future. This co-creation depends on leaders and citizens to transform their ontological standpoints. Lange (2004, p. 137) describes this transformative learning experience as an "ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including in their forms of relatedness." The space of exploration is enabled through learning through emotions and in relationship, particularly in newly-forged relationships with the Other.

What is the inter-relationship between emotions and relationships, dialogue, self-reflection and being forced to for this kind of learning? What are the consequences of such learning? Figure 13 explains the links between various learning elements in the Nexus programme, and the effect that relationships and emotions have on learning. The impact of learning on Nexus is to gain new perceptions of the world, Self and Other, or transformed and more inclusive meaning structures. Mezirow (1996, p. 163) holds that "a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference is one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience,"

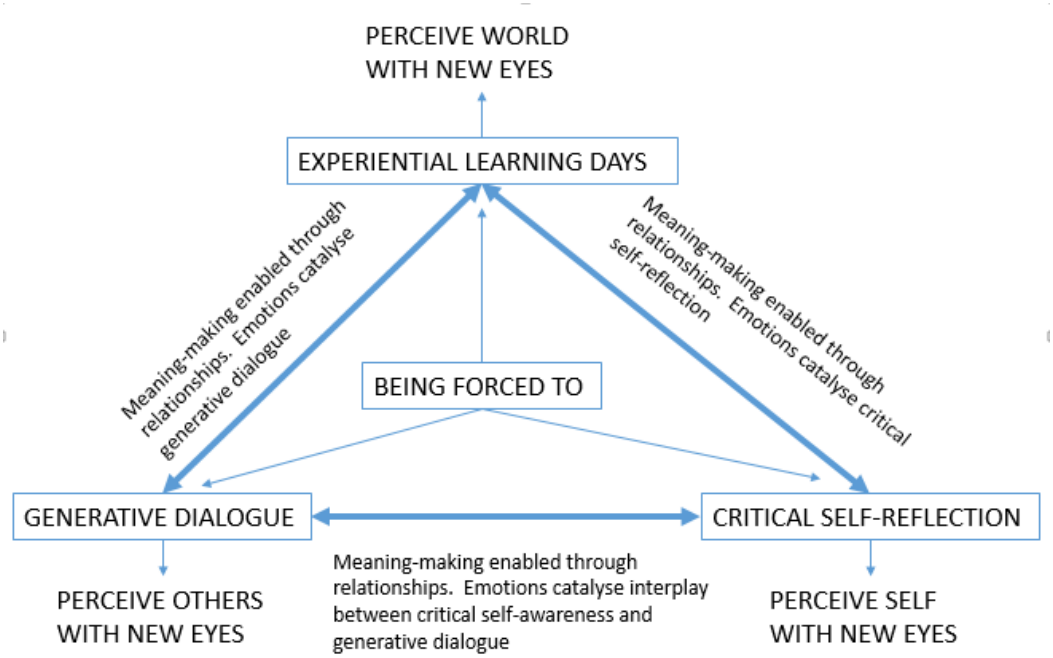


Figure 13. Meaning-making through generative dialogue, critical self-reflection and experiential learning days

The sense of "being forced to" on Nexus is a predominant means of learning. This force moves people out of comfort zones, moves participants to be present physically in places that are deemed forbidden for many reasons, to confront their prejudices and deeply held beliefs, to learn through emotion and others or, put another way, learn in more holistic and different ways, to be different in their interactions with Others, and to build trust where it could not exist before. Mezirow (1991b) spoke about how transformative learning could be triggered by disorienting dilemmas: in Nexus 'being forced to' is a deliberate provocation to enter into many disorienting dilemmas. This is aligned to what Sands and Tennant (2010, p. 100) describe as the educator deliberately setting "out to disrupt comfortable world views held by the participants."

Taylor provides a neurobiological explanation of transformative learning which he states requires, amongst others, "discomfort prior to discovery; is rooted in the students' experiences, needs and interest; [and] is strengthened by emotive, sensory, [and] kinesthetic experiences" (Taylor, 2017, p. 21). For South Africans who are still finding their way in a new democratic country, feelings of discomfort may be the result of entering forbidden spaces and relationships. In Chapter 1, in section 1.1.2, I discussed how legislation, specifically the Group Areas Act (Union of South Africa, 1950a) separated different race groups into segregated living

spaces, or group areas. This Act ensured that the State would be able to control who was living and working in, or even moving though, the various group areas. Under apartheid, the people living in this country developed a deep understanding that space was divided into go and no-go areas.

The Immorality Act of 1927, and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 (Union of South Africa, 1927, 1949) are two Acts that the then parliament of the Union of South Africa passed to deal with interracial relationships (See Martens (2007) for further information about the context for the passing of the Immorality Act). Sexual transgressions across the 'colour line' were seen to be a threat to the civilisation of the White population. Physically and ontologically, forbidden spaces were legalised under apartheid. Nexus allows people to break down the walls between these forbidden spaces. But to break down walls may require being forced to.

Experiential learning days provide an opportunity to physically engage in some of the messiness and fracture of South African life. Walking through the streets of Johannesburg or Diepsloot, and becoming aware through our senses of the noises and smells and seeing people going about their everyday lives is a means of engaging with the country context. In Chapter 5 I provided a thick description of an experiential learning day I participated in, as well as my reflections after the day. Proprioceptive awareness of the context is very different from awareness garnered through media, talk-shows or storytelling. Experiential learning days provide a rich context for generative dialogue and often act as provocation for critical self-reflection.

The literature on transformative learning theory gave rise to the research question on the role of relationships in such learning (Cranton & Wright, 2008; Jokikokko, 2009; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2002; Sands & Tennant, 2010; Taylor, 1997, 2007, 2008, 2017; Wilhelmson, 2006). Relationships play a significant role in learning on Nexus: the quality of relationships built on trust result in a humanising of the Other, an undoing of apartheid's 'truth'. Taylor notes the centrality of relationships in learning when he writes, "It is through relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level … without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the general discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection" (Taylor, 1997, p. 13).

What began as a question about relational learning yielded a surprising insight for me. It is the very nature of relationships that is transformed in Nexus. Sands and Tennant (2010, p. 116) pose the question: "How are relationships changed, modified, reframed, or recast as a result of transformative learning?". There is a willingness by Nexus participants to both break walls of mistrust between the races and to be more inclusive of others, and of their viewpoints.

There is new understanding of the human qualities of Others, an undoing of the dehumanising experienced during apartheid. Further there a readiness to acknowledge that ongoing prejudice and judgement held about Others are values informed by a fractured and hurting society, a society that is all too willing to ascribe misdeeds perpetrated by those of other races to a single dimension, that of race.

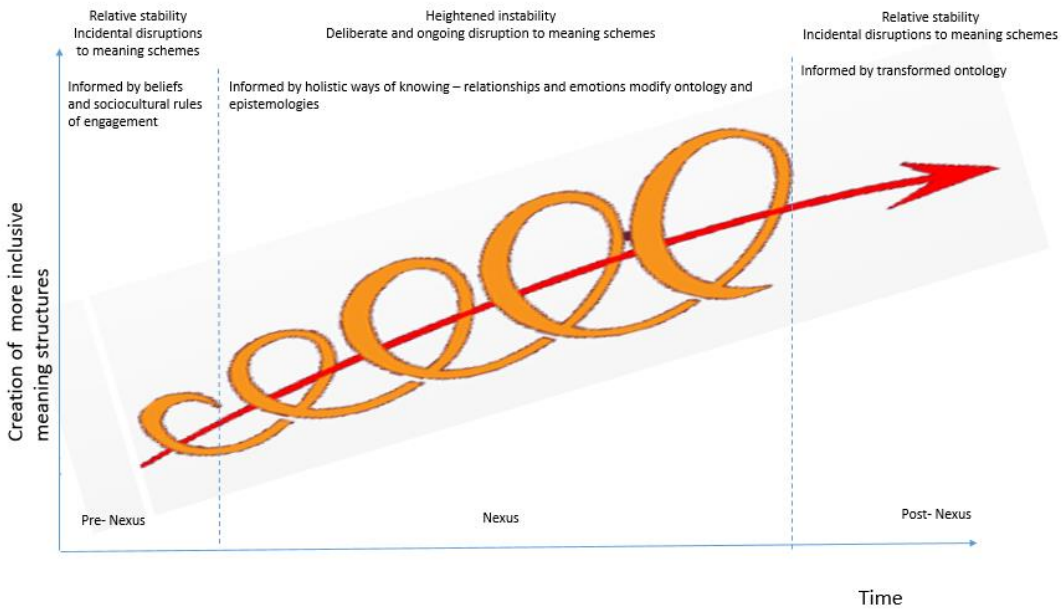


Figure 14. Process of how meaning structures change on Nexus

This research set out to examine the nature of learning on Nexus and the impact of this learning. But perhaps the more important question was how does such learning happen: how is this kind of learning, transformative learning, fostered? In Figure 14 I show an iterative process that shows how meaning structures are revised along a trajectory curve over time. Three phases of pre-Nexus, Nexus and post-Nexus are shown. In the pre-Nexus phase meaning structures are revised in response to incidental disruptions, but are relatively stable. During the Nexus programme, a period of great instability in meaning structures, and through more holistic ways of knowing there is emerging awareness of one's ontological and epistemological position. Post-Nexus, there is a partiality towards knowing that current meaning structures are, at best, the most reliable version of interpreting the world, but that there is always the possibility for revision.

7.4 Addressing nature and impact of learning in Nexus: A response to Newman's mutinous thoughts

Newman (2012a, 2012b, 2014) called into question whether any learning could be deemed transformative, contending that the word 'good' could equally well replace 'transformative' in 'transformative learning'. He questioned the verification of transformative learning, whether transformative learning is different in kind or by degrees, and whether transformation is of identity or consciousness, finite or flowing. He further called into question the ability of people to engage in discourse that facilitates transformative learning, the forms of action that result from this learning, and finally whether it is possible to claim spiritual aspects for this type of learning. He also noted conceptual slippage in the theory (Newman, 2014). Newman (2014) also welcomed arguments against his many critiques.

Newman's question on good versus transformative learning is thought-provoking. As I think about my own learning I can distinguish between good learning, by which I understand that I know something new that I did not before, and that I can retain that understanding and knowledge. When I think of my own transformative learning events it involved questioning the very premises on how I knew something to be true. The 60 year old me, living under a new democracy and interacting with people from other races holds fundamentally different views from the 30 year old me who had lived my entire life under apartheid. The very meaning structures that equipped me to make sense in my earlier years simply do not hold water anymore. This has not been 'good learning': my worldview is altered. On Nexus the opportunities to hold meaning perspectives up to scrutiny and to test their veracity and integrity are many and varied. Through experiential learning days, dialogue in working groups, self-reflective writing and being held accountable for one's learning, the reports by Nexus participants do not speak of 'good learning'. They also tell powerful stories about transformative learning. We see this, for example in the following two quotes:

> [Nexus] was giving me a second chance in life, in dealing with the wounded-ness of society. And Nexus helped me, because at that point I knew I was not capable of assisting, because I myself was wounded . If I still was affected by this pain to this extent, but at this stage I knew that an eye for an eye has not worked for me, and I don't want to go that route, but what route is there? What alternative? So I chose to strengthen self … but I knew it would be transformative to me and to the people, for perpetrator/victim it would be a completely different approach that one, because I would have worked with my pain and ja, just shifting my mind-set in terms of how I see people. (Luleka, Life Story, Dec 5, 2016)

> I can't be this person who is out to randomly hating an entire group of people because of all these slights that really has nothing to do with people, with who this person is, and all it does is that it creates these barriers … all these reasons and excuses to not be human with each other. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Newman also takes contention with the universality of transformative learning theory as a theory that explains all learning. Here I agree with his view: not all learning is transformative, some learning is indeed good but not necessarily transformative. But where Newman argues that transformative learning is not a different kind of learning, I disagree. Several participants in this research claimed that kind of learning, a transformative learning experience, for themselves. Pierre said,

> I am not sure whether Nexus is a good or a bad thing. You can't live with blinkers anymore. You can't just lead this selfish life where you just look after yourself. It changes you. What you were saying is 'can you go back?' No ways. You can't go back. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Newman's (2014, p. 349) description of dialogue within the transformative learning environment is a succinct description of the generative dialogue in Nexus:

> Dialogue is a form of collective, and generative, inquiry. The group focuses on an object of thought, examining it and their reactions and relationships to it. An individual's point of view is valuable if it extends the group's understanding of the object of thought."

However, he questioned the ability of a group to engage in this type of discourse. Whilst all participants did not always find it easy to engage fully in dialogue as described by Newman, there is sufficient evidence in this data to support the fact that it can be done.

Another issue raised by Newman with regard to transformative learning is the focus on psychology of self versus that of the collective. Newman contends that the individual and collective are in a dialectical relationship, and in order to understand consciousness "we examine the encounter between the self and the social and material worlds. Consciousness is a relationship. There is more. Encounters do not exist in a vacuum. They are mediated by all manner of context, phenomenon, and circumstance" (Newman, 2014, p. 352). The evidence of learning in Nexus acknowledges the very connectedness to context and circumstances of the Nexus participants.

Newman's view is that

> if we are to help people learn, then, we do not encourage them to go in search of their faults, and engage in a lonely reordering of their assumptions. We help them engage with the social and material world, and constantly reflect on that engagement. (Newman, 2014, p. 352)

His use of the word "faults" is interesting, particularly as he links it to a reordering of assumptions. In Nexus there is acknowledgement that assumptions and mental models are in place, for better or worse. The more important aspect of transformative learning rests on a reliability to have meaning structures that can deal with increasingly complex situations. In order to achieve this, an engagement with the social world in a group learning context provides the space for this exploration. But as has been seen throughout this chapter, being able to engage with the social world in the context of South Africa does in fact require people to 'engage in a lonely reordering of their assumptions'. This need for self-work, particularly in developing leadership qualities, is more fully explained in the next chapter.

7.5 Conclusion

I ended this chapter with an exploration of the role of emotions and the nature of relationships in Nexus. The nature of learning, and the role of emotions and relationships in such learning were the first two of four research questions this study set out to answer. The last two looked to answer how this learning may impact personal lives and, more broadly, into addressing societal needs and leadership practices. In this chapter I dealt with theorising about the nature of learning using a transformative learning theory lens, and discussed the impact of this learning on personal lives. In the next chapter I will theorise on the impact of learning on Nexus on the broader lives of Nexus participants as well as the impact on their leadership practices.

I leave the last words of this chapter with Newman: "Action is the generative force for learning. It is the context in which learning takes place. And it is the outcome of learning" (Newman, 2014, p. 353). This is a focus of the concluding chapter.

Chapter 8: Learning about leadership: Presenting a 4P Model of learning

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6, using the voices and reflections of Nexus participants, a model for the nature of learning was presented. In Chapter 7, the nature of learning in Nexus and its impact was explored using transformative learning theory as a lens for analysis. There is strong evidence of the depth, breadth and stability of transformative learning outcomes that Hoggan (2016b) explicates. Nexus participants unconsciously foreground more holistic ways of knowing, particularly the role of emotions and relationships in how they learnt on Nexus. But more importantly, the nature of relationships is transformed.

This chapter explores how learning on Nexus relates to broader societal issues and its impact on leadership as reported by Nexus participants. This set of findings is explored using terms explained by the literature on relational leadership, referred to in Chapter 2, where relational leadership comprises authentic, humanising and learning-leadership. In developing a deeper understanding of what leadership is, and how contextual factors influence leadership, participants often inter-relate the internal and external worlds of their leadership. The quotes used in this chapter reference how leadership requires deeper self-awareness and the sometimes painful and hard self-work required in order to be able to lead others. The chapter is constructed around reflections on learning about self, about self-in-context, and how leadership is carried out in places of work and in broader societal or social settings.

These reflections are integrated in a substantial section in which a 4P Model of learning on Nexus is discussed. The chapter concludes with how learning on Nexus relates to broader societal issues and with a discussion on how leadership is informed through participation in Nexus.

8.2 Learning about self

Throughout Chapters 7 and 8 there is a very strong sense that the work of leadership begins with self-work, particularly in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. In Luleka's reflection about what she learnt during Nexus she foregrounded that learning about leadership could only happen once there was a deeper understanding and knowledge of self. Once the work on self had begun she noted that there was a resultant unlocking of the powerful impact from such a leader. Citing examples of leadership in Africa she contrasted evidence of great leadership with a 'different extreme' of leaders who cause harm to their followers or country. Luleka ascribed the failure of leadership to hurt or pain being part of unresolved or absent self-reflection in leaders. This lack of self-reflection may also result in what she termed "stuck-

ness" or an inability or unwillingness to transform what Mezirow (1991b) described as meaning perspectives.

> As the leader it is important for each leader to know themselves and also to heal. You cannot lead others whilst you are in pain and one has seen. Africa is very interesting because it has had some of the greatest leaders but some other leaders who are just … whether it is pain or stuck-ness or I don't know what to call it, but it is just two different extremes. When you look at it you clearly see a leader that has done the work on themselves and how powerful they are in terms of leading others. For me I thought I haven't really done work on myself and I needed to take that step and also how I could bring that back and use it? (Luleka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

This prerequisite step in learning to lead others begins with the need to affirm oneself, to heal, and to be released from hurt or pain. In the following quote we see how this Nexus participant has begun a process of acceptance and appreciation of self, and taking responsibility for how she chooses to be in the world. For this assignment, called "Deepening your learning", participants were invited to

> design and complete an activity that you believe will deepen your learning on this programme in a meaningful way. To do this, you will need to reflect on the questions you have, the resistance that you are feeling, the interest that has been sparked to date or the fears that have emerged. (Nexus, 2017, p. 6)

The rationale for Participant 10 choosing to do this particular assignment began with a realisation that she had not paid sufficient attention to self. Her assignment started with poignant reflections of her self-doubt and a niggling sense that she was an imposter:

> Through my life journey I endured the nagging feeling that I could not make it as I was often told by teachers throughout my journey that I was not the right material. The "fluke factor" has hung over my success and I have come to realize that I an (sic) often my biggest saboteur. I have caught myself projecting this on others, especially my teenage son to the point where he sometimes doubts himself. I suspect many other people have gone through this experience. Before I can answer this and several other questions I want to reflect on my own self-understanding. How do I come across to others and communicate if I have not listened to myself sufficiently?

Here she revealed in her concluding paragraph evidence of her efforts to transform meaning perspectives that were unhelpful for her as a leader.

> As I wind down my year and take stock I am really happy to have taken the Nexus journey and am more affirmed and positive in my self-evaluation and reflection. I know I have invested the best time of my life within the programme and truly look forward to actively using the diverse tools to plan for 2016 and beyond. I am thankful for the amazing people I have met and feel humbled to have listened to many shared stories which have resonated with my own and more importantly helped me to better understand that 'life happens' to us all but what is important is to take genuine stock of what has come to pass and genuinely commit to doing things differently. I have deeper appreciation of who I am and will be more thankful to (sic) what I have been able to achieve to date and less critical of my life. I will do less of 'what could have been' and focus more on 'what good I can do'. Most importantly – I will be more discerning in planning to be more pragmatic (and SMART) to avoid setting unrealistic goals which reinforce a sense of failure when I do not get there. I truly embrace "Rome was not built in a day' as my mantra and still intend to build my "Rome" in my lifetime! This will include focusing on personal and community projects which I have wanted to do over time but have not yet realized. In the meantime… I am walking and running one small step at a time! (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 10).

There is great richness in these musings and reflections. Characteristics of authentic leadership include self-knowledge and self-clarity (avoid setting unrealistic goals which reinforce a sense of failure), self-esteem (more affirmed and positive in my self-evaluation), free from defensive biases (I have caught myself projecting this on others) and the ability to enter into transparent and open relationships (How do I come across to others and communicate if I have not listened to myself sufficiently?). The deep self-work shown in these reflections include gratitude and humility in learning from others, and the acknowledgement that this is the work of a lifetime. Through this, Participant 10 was able to claim responsibility for self. There was a sense of action, both physically in her walking and running, but also in her desire to become more involved in societal issues through community work, thus fulfilling Newman's (2014, p. 353) contention that action is at once the generative force, context for and outcome of learning.

Participant 10 showed the hallmarks of authentic leadership. Sammy-Jane's musings below show how she was enacting both authentic leadership and learning-leadership. Drawing on

leadership lessons from social activists, Preskill and Brookfield (2008) have defined learning-leadership as that which places learning as the central force for leading. They describe the learning-leader as someone who is willingly open, with an entrenched desire to consider multiple perspectives, and to be receptive to the views offered by all, irrespective of the status or accomplishment of that person. Sammy-Jane viewed herself as a perpetual student, always learning from those around her, and also held the view that there was no one correct answer. Self-work for Sammy-Jane meant a shift from an exclusive attitude to learning from others ([only] people I thought were my calibre) to an inclusive view, a realisation that she was cutting herself "off from experiences and people and learning"

> I didn't respect people. I didn't think that I was disrespectful … I was never listening to anybody. How can you respect someone if you were not listening to them? I really was always waiting to speak, I really did think that my thoughts were [the most important] for me … I thought about what made me … all this nonsense that I think in my head and being disrespectful, I shut off … so the profoundest thing for me, and that is the difference between pre-Nexus and post-Nexus, is that I just become the student, I'm a student, and everybody is my teacher. I don't care if it is the cleaner, nothing matters anymore, because I am just walking around with this student mind-set, I don't have to talk all the time, the right answer is irrelevant … I have a heart for people. I never had a heart for people before. I had a heart for certain people, people that I thought were my calibre or whatever, just completely silly, I was cutting myself off from experiences and people and learning and I told you I love learning, that was the most ludicrous thing. When I switched over it was like, "How can you cut yourself off from all these people who could teach you things, are you insane?" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

In holding that she was a leader through learning, there was an accompanying humanising action. Sammy-Jane's 'heart for all people' which moved her beyond just accepting all, given that 'heart' has more emotive and relational dimensions, her new-found realisation of what respect is, and the supporting action that provided the means for holding others in respect are all the actions of humanising leadership. Humanising leadership counters the notion that the Other is deficient either in their unique human qualities or their human nature. It moves from holding exclusionary views of people to embracing all people in their full humanity and potential. Accepting the full humanity of the Other also recognises the dynamic interaction between "identity, community and context" (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015, p. 627), and identity

work needed by both the leader and their followers.

Luleka's humanising of the Other manifested first in herself as an ability to recognise her brokenness and pain, and from there to move to forgiveness. In this process she found self-acceptance, and was able to move beyond her identity as an African into a more universal acceptance of self and others. For her, this self-work provided the stepping stone into participating more fully in society and with others.

> [My relationship with the Afrikaner] went onto another level, a universal level, of humanity in general and my relationship with other human beings and my issues as a person. Do I really know who I am, my purpose, where I am going and am I expressing it and allowing others to do the same in the way I interact with them? That was the big question for me in terms of exploring … when I grew and I began to accept myself for who I am beyond the colour and all that - it has gone beyond African, just considering myself as an African, but it has also enriched that aspect that I allow it to shine, I allow it to express itself – that African part of it. I also have allowed myself to engage with other human beings beyond their …Husk, yes. We are just human beings. We are beautiful and special each one of us. Each one of us has something to give. When we engage beyond colour and race and gender and all that there is a richness that you find that you can't find anywhere else. I can't say Nexus did that, but it was the beginning of something big and at first I was looking at knowing myself, but then it became also engaging with society and engaging with other human beings and making the world into a different space. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

Pierre remembered that his understanding of leadership was changed by challenging his beliefs as tested in reality. It moved his theoretical understanding of what leadership is into how it is enacted into contextual and responsive models of leadership. The self-work that Pierre remembered was the undoing of his beliefs about leadership. This too was linked to his growth and personal development as a leader.

> It is personal growth or leadership growth by having your core beliefs challenged in a real world environment. Not reading some academic version of it. You having this leadership or personal beliefs, but it is a leadership course, so your leadership beliefs [are] challenged and almost tested. It [Nexus] throws you into an environment out there and it comes back and

> says, okay what do you think about it? Don't tell me some textbook stuff. There was no textbook to read up. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Each of these Nexus participants has shown evidence of the deep and profound self-work required to challenge personal beliefs and values, but more importantly the necessity of this step before assuming responsibility for leading others. In these undoing and transformations of meaning perspectives there are indicators of the forms of leadership (authentic, learning or humanising) that is the outcome of the different dimensions of self-work.

One of the central characteristics of authentic leadership is the centrality of leader identity and I now explore the self-as-leader identity within the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

8.3 Learning about self-as-leader in country context

For Buyani, his view about learning about leadership on Nexus was to more fully understand the context in which leadership happens. He ascribed the consequences of such consciousness about context as leading towards being a better person.

> [Teaching on Nexus about] leadership [is] the idea was that it would create a better person that is much more conscious about his or her surroundings and about how the world works. There are very few programmes that take you to these unsung heroes. (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

The unsung heroes he referred to are the leaders Nexus participants meet particularly during experiential learning days. In the following quote Participant 12 makes reference to Mam' Khanyi who had established a home for girls and young women rescued from abuse, trafficking or exploitation. This participant noted that leadership in response to seeing the needs of others in society does not depend on a lifetime of this practice, but that the centre of such leadership depends on being fully engaged and empathetic.

> A renewed hope in life, in people and in dreams. Seeing how Mam' Khanyi, who had not been a philanthropist of any kind before, chose to dedicate her life (resources, time and love) to children who needed a renewal of hope, love and strength. Walking into the Home and experiencing it's (sic) warmth, and understanding the daily journey of the Home and specifically of the children, made one to realise how taking a little bit of time to give of oneself can change someone else's life entirely. Nothing can ever be more comforting than knowing that a few minutes of one's time, true empathy and

> engagement can transform someone else's despair into genuine hope. (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 12)

In the following statement made by Lexie, she conveyed a strong sense of her identity as leader, a key component of authentic leadership. Lexie placed her leadership very much in the context of this country, and for the hard work it takes to undo meaning perspectives that have been developed socio-culturally in the past. To more fully understand how to lead requires a commitment to finding multiple perspectives through a willingness to learn from others. For Lexie leadership exists at many levels and in many places: she made reference to exercising societal, personal and professional leadership.

> If I think of myself as a leader in the South African context. I have a very clear vision in my mind for what this country can be, and could be, and what the things are that we need to do as South Africans to get to that place. And it involves having the hard conversations and it involves sometimes holding the mirror up to ourselves and our own foibles … and the things we were given as kids which were really just blatantly untrue … I have a very clear view about what SA can be, I fundamentally believe we have very, very good people in SA, but there are multiple stories and multiple perspectives and we are obligated to try and look at things from those multiple perspectives. And I do that even in my social life, my social circles. I sometimes have very fierce debates because that is the line that I hold. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

Lexie works in leadership education. After Lexie had competed her year on Nexus she now chooses to foreground matters of social concern in the programmes she designs and directs. A focus of her programmes is on how leaders in a South African context can work in altered ways to make a difference in this country.

> Nexus has profoundly influenced the way that I work. I work on a lot of leadership and management development programmes. A lot of it has a receptive focus or a specific business focus but I always do my work with a very strong social agenda. For me that is about who are you as a South African and how can you make a difference as a South African leader. (Lexie, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

I end this section with a story told by Avinash which highlighted how deeply he felt the need to make a difference in his country.

> Last year about April we were robbed at our home and cars taken, held at gunpoint and everything, my family and I … a few months later my fiancée and I were talking about and she's very angry. "This happened to you and how can you live in a country like this?" and there is all the crime and everything. She said we should pack up and consider moving overseas and living in some country. We get married and emigrate. She asked me, what do I think? I think if I didn't go to Nexus I wouldn't have given her the response I did. I said, "No, I don't think we should emigrate. Nexus showed me all these people doing different things to improve this country and to do something different." I said, "Yes we can emigrate and go somewhere else and live a safe life and not have all of this here but you are running away from this here. You've got an opportunity to do something different in this country and make a difference. Whether I do it to someone at my work place or not I wouldn't be content without making a difference here. There are other people around you wanting to stay and make this country different. Although we have the criminals and maybe some politicians taking us down but there are a lot of people that we saw in Nexus selflessly making a difference to this country and want to make it different so why can't we also?" (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Avinash's use of the phrase "running away from this here" is worth further exploration. This expression conveyed his deep sense of obligation, and connectedness to the needs of people in South Africa. He noted also that he could use his new sense of leadership in his work context to helpfully impact the life or lives of others.

The examples of leadership encountered in settings such as townships and in places where those who have been marginalised live provided a powerful form of learning for Avinash, as well as surfacing a realisation that there are many opportunities in this country to make a difference. In the face of a lived experience of the aggressive invasion of his and his family's personal space he is able to make a conscious decision to remain in the country, and to use his place of work or other sites to contribute to making South Africa work.

Many participants on Nexus reported on the sometimes painful and difficult self-work required in order to lead others. Several reflections by research participants also highlighted their new or developing awareness about what leadership is needed in post-apartheid South Africa to create a more just and fair society. In addition, a number of Nexus participants described how their leadership practices at work had been changed because of their learning on Nexus. This is the focus of the next section.

8.4 Leadership in organisational settings

There is a change in how Sammy-Jane interacts with people at work which came about because of her participation in Nexus. Citing an example of working with a manager with whom there is a conflicted relationship, she revealed that she is now able to consider the tensions and pressures he might be experiencing that cause such strain. In this process she is able to more fully see the person she is dealing with and, through this humanising process, is able to hold a different interaction with him.

> I understand it all as this human process that we are going through, so even a boss who is being overbearing, I look at him and I think – where I never would have done that before, before I would have been "what is this guy's problem?". Now I can put myself in his shoes, ok fine let's think about him as a person, what pressure is he experiencing, you almost lower your own waterline so you can walk in and have completely different conversation than you would before because you are a little more in touch with this person-thing, the language is failing me. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

Laurie found that her learning on Nexus provided her with courage that she was able to bring into the workplace. This courage does not only find expression at work but in her personal circumstances too. She displays qualities of learning-leadership in being open and accepting of how others can teach her, and that these lessons can come from those she may not know. For Laurie, leadership has dimensions of courage and responsibility, where there is responsibility to be open to alternative views and options.

> With courage you can achieve absolutely anything. Just with a little bit of courage and like I really feel that Nexus has given me the courage to ask the hard questions that I maybe would have avoided before in the past and that is personally and at work. Also the courage to step out of my everyday life. Like I said before, to actually learn something from somebody else, and somebody that you don't know. Second last one is for me I definitely feel I have become a better leader after being on this course. Maybe I didn't think that in the beginning and I wasn't sure what this course was going to teach me, but I do feel that some of the skills I spoke about earlier on have equipped me better than some of the other people around me to be a better leader. Almost a responsibility to be the voice in the room when others … can only see tunnel vision, to say, "Maybe you should look at it a different way" and that to me is leadership. (Laurie, Working group, Oct. 15, 2015)

After Avinash had completed the Nexus programme, his responsibilities at work increased and he had to establish and develop a team that reported into him. Directly applying the tools of dialogue learnt during Nexus he established principles that each team member had to be heard, and that all should follow a process of 'checking in'. Checking in provides the means for all present in the room to be acknowledged and recognised, a form of humanising each other.

> As I left Nexus then my role got bigger and I had to develop a team. One of the things I took out was the concept of dialogue. Of how you come in and you check in and everyone has a say, everyone has a voice. You let everyone speak and use the facilitation - I actually adopted that in my team meetings. What you have is a lot of quiet people, they don't want to say, they are happy to calculate their numbers and go back to their desk, they don't want to talk. I used that whole physical thing that we should use in a dialogue session in my team meetings to get every single person in my team to talk and contribute. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

There are several hallmarks of learning-leadership revealed in Avinash's account above. Through his actions he demonstrates how he invites contributions from all, including inviting contributions from the 'quiet people'. Some months later after participating in the focus group, when he was interviewed for his life story, he again recounted how he got the quieter members in a meeting to offer their views. He said

> One of the ways I started conducting the meeting was to have a check in, and I made everyone say [speak], and I waited in the meeting 'You are going to speak, nobody else will speak until you speak' and we had the quietest person now suddenly had a voice and I thought that was powerful. (Avinash, Life story, Sep. 29, 2016)

Such a learning-leader's actions are driven by the belief that every person has something valuable to offer. Additionally, learning-leaders are driven by curiosity of what others do know: they do not believe that they have to hold or, indeed, know all the answers.

Learning-leadership is the focus of this example given by Yadhina. Her learning on Nexus provided her with an awareness of how to listen without judgment to the views of another person. A learning-leader suspends assumptions in order to fully hear others when they speak (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008). This action of acknowledging a co-worker through listening to his solutions released him into a restored ability to carry out his work, but it also provided

opportunities for Yadhina to learn and grow through knowing more about his perspectives and understanding. At the heart of this interaction is relational leadership: both Yadhina and the person she was managing experienced growth and learning through relationship.

> I just couldn't understand how to get through to this guy and how to turn him around … but then over time of being in the role he just dipped in his performance, he just disengaged … And I tried and I tried and every time I failed. And after going on Nexus I just learned you know what, that just give him what the end objective is and allow him to find it, because I was going in saying, "This is the steps that you need to take to get there" whereas he was an out of the box thinker… And just by understanding my own leadership and having more self-awareness, giving him more time to actually speak – because every time he would open his mouth I would think, "You are useless, what do you have to say?" – you know it is those self-judgements that we have of people. And I thought, "You know what Yadhina, just suspend judgement, allow him to speak, even if it takes him a really long time" … allow him the space to speak. Because in that I will learn and grow but I am also allowing him the space to think for himself and I am not always being prescriptive about what the answer is. And I promise you, now that guy is a four performer … just by being more self-aware, just by actually suspending judgement, just quietening my own inner voice – which was all of the key things that Nexus taught me – just caused me to deal with people better. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

Carrie elucidated further the power of listening to learn from others. She highlighted to the Nexus participant that being able to invite other viewpoints leads to innovative solutions to the problems facing the manager and his or her employees.

> Your example of the two new employees is another good illustration of this. Often we assume we understand something fully and make decisions on that basis. In suspending your assumptions and listening to the experience of your employees, you were able to understand the issue differently and to jointly develop an effective plan to address it. Had you not listened to their perspective, I am not sure that you could have come up with as good a solution. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_Assignment 2_Participant 09)

A learning-leader makes a conscious decision to talk less and to invite others to air their views, thus allowing others to develop their own sense of agency. Learning-leaders acknowledge that they do not need to hold all the answers, or to be the one who solves problems. Joe speaks about his comfort in holding decisions and action in abeyance while a process of meaning-making is underway.

> [Nexus] definitely helped me to learn to listen better at work particularly and just let conversations flow and just listen. The other is more comfort with lack of decision and action. Letting a process unfold instead of we have to do this, we have to do that, and we have to do this. I think that definitely impacted there. (Joe, FGD3, Mar.1, 2016)

Leadership thus has many levels and many contexts. This chapter began with descriptions by Nexus participants of the many forms that self-work takes, and in the next section about how this self-work is contextually situated. In both these sections there is a strong story about how apartheid has shaped meaning perspectives, and how difficult it can be to transform these meaning structures, but also how apartheid continues to socioeconomically impact the lives of the citizens of this country, in particular the poor and marginalised. The third section explored how leadership is enacted in the place of work. Nexus participants though also spoke about how their learning about leadership on this programme meant that they were also different in social and home settings. This next and final section deals with these dimensions.

8.5 Leadership in broader societal and social settings

Pierre drew lessons about leadership from what he saw and experienced through interacting with leaders during experiential learning days. He noticed the action component demonstrated by these leaders he met despite their lack of access to resources. He contrasted this leadership in the face of little resources with that of “powerful guys doing absolutely nothing but talking.” Pierre defined leadership as a process of giving to others, having diminished ego, and being purpose driven.

> I learned what leadership in general was about. That to me was also nice. It wasn't about me trying to build myself up. I saw the void and I saw the void in South Africa. After that Nexus programme it is very easy to see through somebody that is not real. I just saw this absolute lack of leadership in this country and this void. You've got people that are doing unbelievable stuff with almost nothing in Alex. You have these ladies running these little schools and doing little vegetable gardens and getting kids off the streets and doing amazing things with no budget. Then you look at these unbelievably powerful guys doing absolutely nothing but talking. Talking big talk but there is no action. That is one thing I really learned about leadership – is what it really is. It is not about suits and power and titles and those kinds of things. It is about a real difference …those leaders are selfless. The 'me-me-me' is gone. Those true leaders that I saw in - the ladies in Alex that did amazing work completely forgot about themselves and they are so focused on that purpose that they've got in their lives, that leadership vision that they've got, they completely forgot about themselves. The 'self' kind of disappears. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Nexus provided the starting point for Avinash to start defining his own leadership model. For him, leadership had professional, personal and societal dimensions. He noted that the relationship with his parents was transformed too. Using a metaphor of being boxed in, he now saw the need to live outside his own world, to participate more broadly in society and at work.

> I think it helped for my style of leadership. It was very beneficial to do it at that stage of my career where I started to just get a team and get people. It sort of formed my way of leadership. I also noticed that I was talking to, for example, my parents differently. Where I sort of opened up conversations that I had never had with them and I could be more confident in the way I spoke about it. That is the one. I took a keen interest a bit more in what was happening around us in South Africa. So you are boxed in and living in your own world. Until today I still look and read more on the country and take more interest in what is going on outside and not just my work space. (Avinash, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Another person who saw the link between personal and societal leadership is Yadhina. Yadhina pointed out that leadership today affects future outcomes for the country, particularly

with respect to tomorrow's leaders. She also linked decisions made by business leaders to having a broader societal impact: business both impacts and is impacted by society. She too used a metaphor of being cocooned and separated from society at large and living in her own world.

> So for me it spoke a lot about societal leadership, and then my personal leadership, and what I am doing today that is going to affect the better of society in the future, and what are those decisions that we are making today as leaders, to try and better society in the future …How do you try and teach children, or if those are going to be our future tomorrow leaders what change are we making? I mean no access to paper, you are just looking at numbers on a wall, looking at alphabets on a wall and that is how we are teaching the children. So for me it was like very touching to say "What are we doing as business leaders to shape the way society is going to be in the future?" And it really opened my eyes to you know we often get cocooned by our world being the be all and end all, and we are still dissatisfied with what we do have. And we have so much. (Yadhina, Life story, Oct. 6, 2016)

Leadership can bring peace and security. Ngao gained agency through reclaiming her strength as a woman of generosity. The self-work she experienced on Nexus was the difficult process of birthing this identity and of overcoming her fears to do so. She too used an image of stepping into a new and courageous journey as a transformed person. There was a great sense of action that accompanied her sense of leadership.

> I quest for peace and security and I see myself in my transformed self as approaching the future with those issues in my space. My agency was from the strength of a woman who can give a lot. I believe that in this year I have spent time struggling with something I've never really let come forth. I let my fears hold me back. I didn't seek to raise my potential because of fear. A lot of the Nexus journey experiences have talked about stepping forward, taking a journey out of yourself, act of courage. I believe I am ready to take that bold step and that many others will join me. (Ngao, Working group, Oct. 15, 2015)

I draw the reflections on the process of learning about leadership as experienced through Nexus together in the next section that now follows.

8.6 Nexus as a transformative learning programme? Presenting a 4P Model

Transformative learning is not acknowledged by the programme managers of Nexus as its theoretical basis, nor was it initially conceptualised as a transformative learning programme. The initial reason given for setting up Nexus was to provide an opportunity for business leaders in various sectors to come together in order to find collaborative ways of understanding each other and to form opinions based on lived realities from diverse points of view. Since 2002 "the programme has at times taken a different shape than the original discussion group" (Binedell, Personal email communication, 20 June 2017) but it still stays true to its original purpose which is to provide a meeting place for people to 'find each other'. In Carrie's words "we're at a stage [now] where we're as divided and as disconnected [as at the beginning of democracy] for kind of for different reasons but I don't see us pulling together as society" (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015).

As was noted in Chapter 5, the case description of Nexus, the first few years of the Nexus programme used as its framework Scharmer's (2000) *U Process of co-sensing and co-creating – presencing* to guide dialogue in the working groups. In the later years of the Nexus programme the tools of dialogue were more overtly named and practiced. Carrie (Interview, Sept. 15, 2015) explained, when she more recently began in her role as lead facilitator on Nexus that she "put a lot more emphasis on the theory and practice of dialogue because I think that it's the one important, hard core kind of thing that we hand to people coming out of Nexus is a really deep understanding of what dialogue is and how to do it."

Buyani, a 2002 participant, recounted: "I am trying to think now whether there was a systematic approach because Nexus was just designed as a meeting place ... For us it was you bring your own knobkerrie there. Somebody else brings an assegai" (Buyani, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 5, Buyani was making reference to handheld weapons used in physical fighting. Pierre, who participated in Nexus in 2007, noted "Buyani is right. There wasn't a lot of debriefing after our sessions" (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016). This stands in contrast to the experience of Avinash (FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016) who noted that "by the time we got to Nexus Ten [in 2011] it felt very structured" and Sammy-Jane (Nexus 2014) who referred to the more structured approach as "practicing the course" when she recounted "It got so bad so quickly, then someone else was like 'Practice the course. Why do you say that, what experiences did you have?'" (FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

Thus, over the course of years since 2002 the programme has taken "different shapes" as noted by Binedell. With the introduction of a clearer focus on the tools of dialogue in more recent years, Nexus participants are able to confidently name and identify the processes learnt in Nexus that they need to practice and apply. There is a language that they can use when

describing some of the processes they follow in Nexus. However, the structure of experiential learning days, reflection, dialogic learning, and checking in and out during working groups have remained constant features of Nexus since its inception.

Transformative learning is that "which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building" (Taylor, 2009a, p. 3). So does Nexus foster transformative learning? Is it an example of a transformative learning programme? During Nexus is there opportunity for participants to identify problematic ideas, beliefs, values and feelings? Is there opportunity to critically assess underlying assumptions and, through rational discourse, to test the justification of their assumptions? Is justification for testing beliefs only achieved through rational discourse, or could there exist other ways to determine this? Is there a striving for consensus?

In order to answer these questions I first discuss the nonformal adult education context of Nexus and the qualification earned on Nexus, and what this means for participants to stay engaged, or not, in the programme. I then raise another question: why did Nexus participants frequently make use of the expression of being 'forced to' perform certain actions in Nexus? This scene-setting provides a platform to introduce the 4P model that theorises learning about leadership on Nexus, and its impact.

8.6.1 Introduction to the 4P model

Assessment of learning on Nexus is not based on demonstration by participants of their mastery of content, but rather on their engagement in both the various programme events and in processes of reflection. This is consistent with Mezirow's (1991) view, as cited in Cranton and Hoggan (2012, p. 523), "that we can evaluate only the *process* of transformative learning, not the *product*" (italics in original). At the end of the year a certificate of attendance is awarded on the basis of participation in experiential learning days, in the working groups and community impact day and on the submission of reflective assignments. The fact that it is only the award of a certificate that signals the completion of participation in Nexus is significant given that participants invest a substantial amount of time involved in Nexus activities and in reflective exercises. In addition, the programme fee for Nexus is priced at a premium level. Thus, there is investment of money and time in this particular leadership programme, and the qualification for Nexus may not necessarily be perceived by employers as having academic currency.

During the time of closing out the first focus group Buyani raised a point in response to a question I had asked earlier in the evening. He said "I was thinking about your question, that your question is unfair – [you said] we are in an academic institution, did we learn something?

Do you get a certificate from Nexus?" When Pierre said, "We got one, I think" Buyani's lament was, "Oh man, I didn't get it." A little later Pierre picked up on the matter of a Nexus qualification, saying:

> Buyani is also right to say there was not a formal [qualification] … For what you pay and the time that you invest - for a long time it wasn't on my CV and then a while ago I had to update [my CV] and I thought "I am going to put it on" [because] it was a real experience. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016)

Avinash responded by saying. "I put it on my CV and it is on my LinkedIn profile." So it seems that the certificate has significance as a badge of honour, and this badge is a signifier of a particular lived experience: it does not serve to show that academic or formal learning has in fact taken place.

Another factor worth noting is that throughout the Nexus programme, participation remains a voluntary and volitional act. As discussed previously in Chapter 6, a significant number of Nexus participants are nominated by their organisation to enrol in Nexus: they do not deliberately choose to participate in Nexus. Some people elected to withdraw during the programme. Joe (FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016) noted that

> over the course of the thing [Nexus] participation dropped throughout and by the end half the people would show up. … I don't know who dropped off and who just didn't show up anymore. At the graduation day people weren't there but they still had the envelopes. I think our working group was five people and one wasn't there over the last few sessions. She had kind of fallen away.

What Joe is highlighting here is that some participants chose to deliberately opt out of Nexus, but because some of his working group members had certificates ("they still had the envelopes") this signifies that they had met the requirements through submission of their assignments but that they may have opted out of ("fallen away") some of the dialogue events and experiential learning days.

I highlighted that the Nexus qualification is a certificate of attendance and that participants exercise their rights as adults to choose to stay involved in Nexus, or to move away. This background is what made me puzzle over the repeated expressions by Nexus participants that they felt 'forced to' perform certain actions because of Nexus. Why would people choose to pay a substantial amount of money, and make a significant time commitment to a programme which adds little value to one's CV, if participation on the programme made them feel uncomfortable? Why, if there remained throughout the duration of the programme the option

to leave Nexus, did people continue their participation, especially if they felt 'forced to'?

I move now towards offering a possible explanation for this phenomenon, and propose that Nexus is indeed a transformative learning experience for many of its participants. In so doing, I also offer an answer to an oft repeated question raised by Taylor (2009a, 2017) about the student's role in fostering transformative learning. In this next section I discuss the first of the 4Ps which is prescribed process.

8.6.2 Prescribed (and purposeful) process

Nexus uses a problem-posing pedagogy, and provocations for learning are deliberately constructed through experiential learning days, dialogue and reflection. This section deals in turn with each of these three parts of the prescribed process. The first part of the prescribed process discusses how experiential learning days may or may not contribute to transformative learning reported by study informants.

Dix (2016), citing the work of Cardinal John Henry Newman published in 1870 (*An essay in aid of a grammar of assent*) offers Newman's concepts of notional assent versus real assent as a means to describe and understand transformations in meaning structures. Dix notes that Newman defined notional assent as the knowing that is bloodless, understanding that arises from abstractions, an intellectual phenomenon. Real assent, on the other hand, is defined as knowledge that, at least in part, is acquired through "acquaintance with the particularity of the real or imagined instance" (Dix, 2016, p. 150). Such understanding is richly constructed, contextual and is connected to values, feelings or motives. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) contend that in order to be able to ground decontextualised abstractions, this needs to happen in multiple contexts. "By grounding notions in experientially realized context, real understanding facilitates learning transfer, thus enabling us to recognize, appreciate, and respond to the actual relevance of those notions in our lives" (Dix, 2016, p. 151). Certainly for many South Africans who experienced apartheid directly, or learnt about it through socio-cultural means, there is the real danger that apartheid could now be seen as an abstraction. There is rich evidence in this research that has been reported in Chapters 5 to 8 to support a shift from notional to real understanding about our shared history of legalised separation along racial lines.

Often experiential learning events, or immersions, have been generally described as disorienting dilemmas (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Langan, Sheese, & Davidson, 2009; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon, & Robertson, 2003). Taylor (2009b, p. 284) writes that through experiential learning events "learners are confronted with individuals and lifestyles that portray another way of living and provide new perspectives to students." Taylor's use of the word

‘confront’ is how many participants reported on their reactions during experiential learning days: expressions such as ‘hit us’, ‘hit us in tears’, ‘the hair on my neck’, ‘get knocked sideways’, and ‘can’t shake the feeling’ are the kind of descriptions used in recalling felt experiences during visits to certain places. Many participants reported on learning about leadership through meeting people with few resources but who are able to effect change in their community. Here Pierre (FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016) said:

> You have these ladies running these little schools and doing little vegetable gardens and getting kids off the streets and doing amazing things with no budget. Then you look at these unbelievably powerful guys doing absolutely nothing but talking. Talking big talk but there is no action. That is one thing I really learned about leadership – is what it really is. It is not about suits and power and titles and those kinds of things. It is about [making] a real difference.

Pierre’s learning about leadership has indeed been informed through meeting individuals ‘that portray another way of living’, in this instance those who have presented powerful testimonies about leadership in adversity.

I now turn to the second part of the prescribed process, dialogue. In Chapters 1, 5, 6 and 7 the rules for dialogue within Nexus have been explored and explained, but for purposes of reminding the reader, dialogue has four key practices: listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing. Gunnlaugson (2006, p. 9) refers to these as in-the-moment practices which serve as guidelines during dialogic conversation. Dialogue as a practice is a particular focus of working groups. During dialogue participants are also overtly invited to be vulnerable in order to be enabled to give full expression to their thoughts and feelings. Inviting participants to become vulnerable could contribute to a felt experience of being forced to.

As has been noted in Chapter 1, working groups have two main purposes: to practice dialogue; and to offer opportunities for the Nexus participants to deepen and widen their understanding of complex contextual social issues.

Research informants reported that they were able to build trust because of the way in which Nexus is structured. From an observation of a working group, as well as what has been gleaned from life story interviews and focus group discussions, the working group has a very structured approach. This structured approach was discussed more fully in section 1.3, but of importance to note is that the ritualised processes such as checking in at the beginning, checking out at the end, storytelling and using the tools of dialogue to debrief an experiential learning day and the resultant discussions, leads to powerful learning.

Citing Shulman, Gravett and Petersen (2009, p. 101) write

> learning is least useful when it is private and hidden; it is most powerful when it becomes public and communal. Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it.

Sammy-Jane (FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016) put it this way:

> Carrie always used to say that we have a conversation with no sides, so whatever you say is a gift to the table, and you put it here and someone else progressively elaborates on that thing and it's not yours anymore, it belongs to the group, so don't have a feeling about it, let it go.

What stands out as a remarkable feature in working groups is that they are self-facilitated. Given that South African society is characterised by fracture and hurt, and that often the focus of the dialogue may be dealing with past or present injustices or matters of inequality, there is no external party guiding or facilitating the learning process in working groups. In the working group I observed there was no obvious 'leader'. The lack of 'leader' or 'leaders' is in contrast to what I have sometimes noted in other group settings. During the working group session, which took nearly two hours, the dialogue flowed through and between the members of the group with no dominating voice, nor did I get a sense of factions within the group. Hallmarks included deference and respect, curiosity and challenge, honesty and humour. And at the end of the session I felt I knew some of each person's story deeply.

As argued in Chapter 7, Nexus dialogue carries the marks of Gunnlaugson's (2006) four characteristics of generative dialogue. These characteristics are firstly a lifelong practice, secondly a responsiveness to temporal dimensions, thirdly a developmental process and finally a means of developing meta-awareness of thought processes. Each of these characteristics can be noted in the prescribed process of learning on Nexus, and I briefly elucidate in what ways these frame how participants may feel forced to.

Dialogue is a difficult practice as was noted by several participants in their reflective assignments. Many reported that they identified as being good listeners until the requirements of one of the assignments to engage in one of the key dialogic practices surfaced a realisation of how difficult it is to listen deeply and emptily. Dialogue is messy, it does not follow set rules and timing; in the instant of either expressing a view or listening to the views of another there can be moments of great difficulty felt and experienced, and dialogue is time-consuming.

Several participants reported that they over-ran the close out time for their working group sessions, but for some that was where opportunities for deep learning were realised. It is Gunnlaugson's contention that there is continual need to practice dialogue in order to develop the skills and capacity needed. It is indeed a lifelong endeavour.

The second characteristic of generative dialogue is that the source of learning derives from the past, present and future. Scharmer's (2000) concept of presencing, which Scharmer coined from a combination of two words 'sensing' and 'present', is the ability to make sense of the past and, in the present moment, envision future possibilities. This stands in contrast to "re-enacting the past through projection" (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 11). For contemporary South African society this is a crucial mandate: re-enacting the past is to continue the dehumanisation project established under apartheid. During working groups Nexus participants grapple with presencing.

Working groups, as stated earlier, display 'messy dialogue'. The conversation appears to meander throughout the participants with some topics being brought up again at several and different times and then suddenly, seemingly resolved. This developmental process, the third of Gunnlaugson's four characteristics of generative dialogue, can be uncomfortable for some participants: Leazal initially found the unstructured approach in dialogue to be difficult but eventually was able to be comfortable with the process. Sammy-Jane noticed that being aware of how everyone's focused attention during dialogue shifted the ability of the group to surface deeply held thoughts and assumptions:

> I learnt in that moment that really the type of attention that you pay really changes, elevates the conversation. Because the conversation completely changed, a lot of us were actually talking about it afterwards, saying "I had no intention of saying what I said", but because everybody was being so courageous and really digging, really, really digging that in the end you can't help but … go and find them [your thoughts]. (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016)

The fourth and final characteristic of generative dialogue is that of meta-awareness of thoughts and feelings. Because Nexus participants are encouraged to suspend judgement during dialogue, they become able to loosen the identification with their views and beliefs (Gunnlaugson, 2006, p. 3), and in so doing become more aware of their thought processes in the moment. Carrie described this as being aware of the steps taken in a dance, but also in the ability to respond to the music as one takes these steps.

I now deal with the third and last of the prescribed practices in Nexus, that of reflection.

Reflection is a continual process during Nexus: before going out on experiential learning days, participants are briefed to notice certain features during the visits, to pay attention to their perceptions and to be aware of the thoughts and feelings that arise during the day. In preparation for storytelling, the act of reflection guides which parts of a life story will be shared with the group. During the working group, in listening and responding to others there is a process of reflection, and certainly after the working groups many research informants reported on the reflection they engaged in to help make sense of what had been shared by the group. It could be claimed that for some research informants there are still lingering reflections that emerged from Nexus. Nexus participants are also encouraged to keep a journal but this practice is not monitored by the programme managers. But the most obvious physical evidence of this prescribed practice of reflection in Nexus is in the form of written assignments.

As has been noted previously assignments are assessed not for marks, but rather on how the participant reports on their understanding of the process of dialogic practices. While Taylor (2007, p. 182) notes that "the written format potentially strengthens the analytical capability of transformative learning", it also provides the means for a trusted person external to the internal-world responsible for creating the reflection to provide an outsider's reflections on how the participant experienced the process of dialogue. Donaldson's (2009, p. 73) article on fostering transformative learning in a school leaders' leadership programme also notes the requirement to submit written reflective assignments as part of the assessment process. A key difference between the reflective tasks required by these two leadership programmes is that Nexus focuses on reflections on the processes of dialogue or learning whereas in the school leadership programme cited by Donaldson the reflection is on how well the "knowledge base for leadership [has been] … applied (or not applied)." While both are indeed reflective tasks, in the case of Nexus there is reflection on thought and feelings, and in the school leadership programme the reflective task is on how knowledge was applied.

The prescribed and purposeful process (the first P of the model) experienced during Nexus thus encompasses exploring the social context during experiential learning days and engaging in dialogic processes, practiced in working groups and applied in assignments. During both experiential learning days and working groups and throughout the Nexus programme participants are involved in reflection.

Having described the **prescribed process** I now turn to a discussion of how participants willingly (or not) **participate** in this learning programme.

8.6.3 Participation: Willingness to - opting in, opting out

> Nexus is absolutely how I wish more adult education was, in that it's - so there are a couple of struggles [to explain it] but it is absolutely what you put in and what you are willing to take out. So if you perceive a value to yourself and if you engage, it is an incredible programme. (Ian, Life story, Oct. 3, 2016)

As noted in section 8.6.1, the introduction to the 4P Model, some Nexus participants choose to either withdraw entirely from the programme or to not attend certain events. In the data collected for this research the views of marginal or non-participants is absent and is noted as an opportunity for further research. So this section deals with what emerged from those who were willing to continue their participation in Nexus, despite sometimes feeling that they were being forced to.

As described in Chapter 6, section 6.3.7, 'being forced to' emerged from an inductive coding of the data, and this notion proved to be something that rankled and niggled me until I began writing this chapter. Why was I hearing cheerful reports about being forced to, about being pushed out of a comfort zone, being in the crucible, being milled? Nowhere in the interviews with the programme managers did 'being forced to' emerge as something deliberately designed to happen. Certainly the programme managers did report on Nexus participants being forced out of their comfort zones, but this was more in acknowledgment of how Nexus participants were giving them informal feedback: a reflection of the programme managers' sense-making. There seems to be an appreciation by programme managers that inherently the process will lead to discomfort and, without using the language of transformative learning, that it is the meaning-making within an exploration of country context that gives rise to feelings of discomfort. Noticeably, Carrie said that the expectations to read and reflect and go on experiential learning days were 'invitations to learning.' Why did Carrie see these as invitations to learn, yet the participants experienced feelings of being forced to?

Invitations to learning events and processes are perceived by Nexus participants as a forcing into. This can be seen in a reflection by Leazal (FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016) who recalled: "You are forced into these experiential learnings and these dialogues and whatever else ... that forced reflection was a bit annoying at first ... you are here to talk to people in a setting that's not regulated." Pierre (FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016) noted that "they kind of forced you to talk about some of the tougher topics" and Lexie (FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016) as "it's to have the difficult conversations". These comments highlight how some participants saw the Nexus programme itself as the enforcer.

There is acknowledgement that some of the being forced to happens at the level of the group. “I think going through this course some of the stuff that we were exposed to as a group, some of the people you saw, I don’t care how hard you were you could not not crumble inside” (Tebang, Working group, Oct. 15, 2015). Avinash (FGD1, Feb.2, 2016) recalled:

> I remember people crying there from what they heard. ... That like hit us in tears. Then you have a group that you are mixed so you have Black people and White people. Some are feeling very hurt and others are feeling very ashamed to be associated with that. Those are the emotions that you come out from there.

What Avinash was foregrounding here was being part of a learning experience in which he became aware of the anger, fear and guilt within his group. The presence of this range of emotions was not something that Avinash felt separate from. He too was caught up in his own responses to the emotions of others.

For a few other participants the discomfort and sense of being forced into lay in the self-work required, the painful undoing of meaning structures. Sammy-Jane poignantly wondered about “the process of confronting myself and seeing myself sort-of plainly, neither a good guy nor a bad guy ... ‘What does it take to be yourself when it can hurt you?’” (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016). Lawrence (Life story, Nov. 30, 2016) described his learning experience on Nexus thus: “I went in [to Nexus] knowing I was right and I came out [of Nexus] wondering if I am right. And what if I am wrong?” For Leazal, her discomfort arose from the extent to which she needed to become vulnerable: “We allude to it but you never know HOW vulnerable” (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

Some of the feeling of being forced to arises out of accepting the invitation to learn in order to complete assignments. In carrying out one of the assignments Participant 16 noted that “at times it has felt uncomfortable for me and I have forced myself to go there, to be open to new dimensions in my working relationships” (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 16). The site of this ‘being forced to’ happened within this Participant 16’s place of work. There are very high risks associated with experimenting with new ways of being in the workplace, so it is little wonder that Participant 16 felt uncomfortable and felt forced into an ‘unnatural’ action.

But for many Nexus participants, confronting our relationships with those believed as Other carries a deep sense of being forced to. This ‘forcing to’ is an undoing of meaning structures firmly established under apartheid. The following three quotes address the difficult notion of re-humanising the Other.

In Luleka's quote we see reference to her own woundedness and that this woundedness extends into society.

> [Nexus gave] me a second chance in life, in dealing with the woundedness of society. And Nexus helped me, because at that point I knew I was not capable of assisting, because I myself was wounded. (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016)

In this feedback Carrie reflected how engaging across the lines of inequality led to being challenged.

> [Doing your assignment] is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on how challenging it is for us to engage in dialogue across the dramatic inequality in South Africa, and to gain insight into some of the conditions required to make it a meaningful exchange. (Carrie, feedback to participant 1 Assignment 1)

And Joe made reference here to engaging with someone from a group against whom he felt deep prejudice.

> The interactions that I've had with Afrikaners has just been really problematic around race. Nexus actually forced me to deal with it, at least start to deal with it. I am still dealing with it. (Joe, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016)

It seems that once the invitation to learn has been accepted, there is also an acceptance to engage in the hard work of what this learning requires. The invitation to learn needs to be in a constant state of being accepted, those who choose to refuse the invitation may then opt out of part or all of the process. In the choosing to accept the invitation to learn, learners become agents of their own transformative learning.

Gravett and Petersen (2009, p. 107) describe this process as the creation by educators of "the conditions under which learners are pushed toward their learning edge, where they are challenged and encouraged toward critical reflection." Berger (2004) describes why there can be feelings of great discomfort. She writes:

> My experience has shown me that the edge is the most precarious - and important - transformative space. It is in this liminal space that we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits. This makes the liminal zones between our knowing and not knowing … difficult to understand - because they are constantly moving and being redefined. (Berger, 2004, p. 338)

I return to an earlier question I posed about why Carrie saw the various provocations to learn as invitations but participants experienced this as being forced to. Carrie, an educator of adults who has familiarity with leading Nexus participants towards their learning edges, trusts that those who take up the invitation possess the capacity and ability to learn both about themselves and through others. For learners who may not have been exposed to this particular pedagogy the required change in their meaning structures is difficult: undoing an entrenched dehumanising philosophy with the accompanying identity work required in order to rehumanise self and others 'when it can hurt you' needs courage and support in trusted relationships.

So far I have discussed how invitation to a **prescribed process** in Nexus may be willingly or unwillingly accepted by programme participants. This, the second 'P' of the 4P Model, is termed **participation**. In the third section I discuss that for those who do participate in the process there is indeed **powerful and profound** transformative learning.

8.6.4 Profound transformative learning

In Chapters 6 and 7 the role of emotions and relationships in learning on Nexus was discussed. In this section I shall focus more on how relationships reportedly impacted learning on Nexus. I briefly reiterate here the point made in Chapter 7 about the matter of fact reporting about emotional ways of knowing as reported by Nexus participants. In the reporting on dialogue during working groups and on experiential learning days accounts are woven through with reference to heated conversations, emotional responses during experiential visits and an own inner turmoil as participants looked to resolve incongruencies in their meaning schemes.

In exploring the question of whether Nexus could in fact be deemed a transformative learning experience, I offer here two quotes: one from Mezirow (2003) explaining what transformative learning is, and the second from Lexie who in layman's terms explains her sense of learning on Nexus.

Mezirow said:

> Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference - sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) - to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 1-2)

Lexie said:

> We get moments of breakthrough where we surpass our own mental models and our own mind-sets and we start to get a glimpse of the fact that a) our life experience is limited and b) a bit of curiosity gives you access to the real richness of other perspectives out there … there are so many issues to actually have conversations about, and so many levels of understanding. (Lexie, Life story, Oct. 16, 2016)

Lexie's explanation of her learning on Nexus could have been drawn directly from Mezirow's writing. The parallels between: "transform problematic frames of reference" and "surpass our own mental models and our own mind-sets"; "make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" and "gives you access to the real richness of other perspectives out there"; and "sets of fixed assumptions and expectations" and "get a glimpse of the fact that our life experience is limited" are remarkable for the extent of her reporting of a transformative learning experience.

As noted earlier, Nexus programme managers do not make reference to transformative learning theory when they refer to learning design or as the theoretical framework used in Nexus. So it is all the more remarkable that the language and concepts of transformative learning are so pervasive in the reflections by research informants about Nexus. In Table 15 I present layman expressions used to describe learning and compare it with concepts found in the literature on transformative learning theory.

Table 15 *Nexus in the words of the layman and theorist*

Drawn from participant reflections about learning on Nexus	Drawn from literature on transformative learning theory
When you have this type of learning that challenges your core belief system (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016).	Epochal shift that transforms one's being and identity (Tisdell, 2012, p. 26)
This new reality that gets created. (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016).	Some transformative learning experiences transform our very core identity or worldview (Tisdell, 2012, p. 25).
When people start telling their stories, their humanness emerges and you can see it … I find it very spiritual actually (Luleka, Life story, Dec. 5, 2016).	The "form" that transforms involves multiple domains on a significant level – emotional, rational, physical, and perhaps spiritual as well (Tisdell, 2012, p. 26).
Perception of that person from what you were brought up with but now you are hearing their story and you are hearing something else and it breaks your perception and then you realised that they are just another person like you (Avinash, Life story, Sept. 29, 2016).	The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context – biographical, historical, cultural – in which they are embedded (Mezirow, 2012, p. 73).
It wasn't just the mind. Nexus didn't just engage the mind it challenged the mind, it challenged your assumptions. You would go home sometimes and try and figure out "Why you are feeling how you are feeling?" (Lerushka, FGD3, Mar. 1, 2016).	Feelings are found to be the rudder for reason, without which it wanders aimlessly with little or no bearing in the process of making decisions. Also, research on memory reveals an active and nonconscious cognitive process that has been found to have a significant influence on how we make meaning of the world around us (Taylor, 2001, p. 234).
It's how we relate to each other, and there is a difference that comes into the room when you have your own awakening … you feel it … We have a softness almost for each other's stories … but it's a feeling … We can almost love each other for who we are (Leazal, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).	Expressive ways of knowing provide empathic connections for learning-within relationship … Being able to identify with the experiential knowing of others becomes the basis for learning-within-relationship. Developing empathic connection is especially difficult when the other's life experience is very different from one's own but is critical when emotions are aroused (Yorks & Kasl, 2006, p. 52).
In Nexus, we [are] often asked to reflect and challenge ourselves, our limitations and with the intention of gaining a more rich and meaningful understanding of ourselves, other[s], our communities and our country (2015_Assignment 3_Participant 17).	A metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired frame of reference—a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs, and concepts—by assessing its epistemic assumptions. This process makes frames of reference more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow, in Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 124) .
Accepting emotion, accepting life as it comes to you or even the emotions that you need to, to get through it and obviously learning from that as well (Tebang, Working group, Oct. 25, 2015).	Emotion/feeling, attention, and working memory interact so intimately that they constitute the source for the energy of both external action (movement) and interaction action (thought, animation, reasoning) (Damasio, 1994, cited in Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 566).

Drawn from participant reflections about learning on Nexus	Drawn from literature on transformative learning theory
Because Nexus makes everything valid, everything valid, your experiences valid, your emotions are valid, so too everybody else's, there is a sort of ease that settles in the group so easily that nothing is trite anymore (Sammy-Jane, FGD, Feb. 24, 2016).	[These approaches] provide a way of thinking more symbolically about the expression of emotional issues among adult learners and how these issues might reflect the powerful movement and journey of souls, a journey that is at once both deeply rooted in the here-and-now and in ageless myths and that is personal and transpersonal (Dirkx, 2008, p. 25).
I am not sure whether Nexus is a good or a bad thing. You can't live with blinkers anymore. You can't just lead this selfish life where you just look after yourself. It changes you. What you were saying is 'can you go back?' No ways. You can't go back (Pierre, FGD1, Feb. 2, 2016).	Depth refers to the impact of a change, or the degree to which it affects any particular type of outcome ... Breadth refers to the number of contexts in which a change is manifest … When learning outcomes are restricted to only one context of a person's life, then regardless of how impactful the learning is for that context, it should not qualify as transformative. The third criterion is relative stability. The very concept of transformation implies that a permanent change has occurred; it is irreversible (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71).

Given the overwhelming evidence in this data that links strongly to transformative learning theory, I propose that certainly in spirit Nexus is a programme based on transformative learning theory.

In their study of the impact of relationships in professional development, Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek (2000) describe two categories of workplace relationships, that of instrumental assistance and emotional support. In the study conducted by Gersick et al. (2000) the relationships were predominantly embedded within the organisation. In Nexus both instrumental assistance and emotional support is evident, but a particular strength of relationships in Nexus is that it is removed from the workplace. This creates trust that allows participants to move towards the learning edge. When questioned about whether safe spaces for dialogue could be created in their place of work, many participants thought that it would be difficult to implement because there were opinions and values they would not like to share with their work colleagues. They expressed an opinion that there is an associated risk of views that are deeply shared being used against them.

Research about the types of developmental relationships in transformative learning by Carter (2002) found four classes of relationship. These are described as utilitarian, love, imaginative and memory. Utilitarian relationships could be similarly described as a form of instrumental assistance, and love, imaginative and memory as emotional support. The types of relationships formed during Nexus need further research: it is possible that a type of reconciled

relationship is present in Nexus?

So far I have discussed three of the 4Ps. In Nexus there is a **prescribed process**, and for those who exercise their choice to **participate** in the prescribed process there is **profound transformative learning**. In this fourth and final section I propose that there is a **praxis** of leadership that is a consequence of this learning on Nexus.

8.6.5 A praxis of leadership

In this final section on the 4P Model I place emphasis on how leadership practices in the lives of Nexus participants are impacted. The influence of Nexus on participant's leadership was discussed more fully earlier in this chapter. Participants report powerfully about the self-work that Nexus required of them, and through this process they become more able to lead self. Part of this self-work led to the realisation that living in one's own bubble ignored the greater context and needs of society.

There were also many reports about how the work of leadership often begins with the self. Despite the pain that self-work sometimes requires, for many there was a sense of liberation from reliving their history or from dealing with unsurfaced assumptions.

Leadership within the immediate family and with friends was also noted. Some Nexus participants spoke about losing friendships because relationships with less-informed or less-transformed friends created difficulties during social discourse. Other Nexus participants reported that they spoke differently to their parents, or that communication with partners or children was more open.

Certainly for some Nexus participants, leadership practices at work were impacted because of learning on Nexus. These include practical steps such as those taken by Avinash who models meetings on working group principles and Lexie who designs more inclusive and societally focused leadership courses. Others reported attitudinal changes such as Yadhina who is now open to gaining new understanding from listening to those she had previously dismissed as being unable to add value in solving problems, and Mandla who was able to speak to his boss about his boss's poor communication with him.

In a quote used earlier in this chapter, Pierre noted how people at the grassroots level with minimal resources were leading within their communities. Carrie contrasted the leadership at community level with that of leadership within corporates and government. She noted:

> In South Africa we do quite a good job of creating change agents at community level and we don't do a very good job of creating change agents at a kind of a group of people who are in a higher socio-economic bracket who have a greater degree of influence in some ways over vast amounts of resources and I think until we've got change agents all the way through society we're not going to win. (Carrie, Interview, Sept. 15, 2015)

At the time of the interviews a few Nexus participants reported how their participation had influenced or changed future career options. Ian is now sustainability manager of a newly created portfolio at a large multinational; Tebatso, armed with an MBA post-Nexus, joined an organisation that manages social investments; Ngao became involved in a newly established leadership academy at another university; Boss created new partnerships with previously 'forbidden' partners; and Lerushka left the corporate employment sector and now runs her own business at the interface of business and sustainability.

Leadership in society is exercised at the level of the individual and is not viewed as an abstract means by some external group to effect change. The power of changing society lies in changed relationships, healing of fractures, an openness to alternate explanations of why society functions as it does, in an interest in being bridge builders and wall breakers. Carrie put it this way:

> In my own mind, there are few more important contributions you could make to the future of South Africa than continuing to experiment with how we can create shared spaces differently. This will not be done at the level of grand theories. It will be done by people like you who have the courage to test out new ways of being, new patterns of connection, new ways to enact respect; respect not only for cultural and religious beliefs and practices, but for all beliefs and practices and ways of being. (Carrie, feedback to participant, 2015_ Assignment 03_Participant 13)

It was always Mezirow's contention that personal transformation would lead to social transformation. This view was often challenged by others, amongst many others Collard and Law (1989), Cunningham (1992) and Newman (1994). Rose (2015, p. 43), reflecting on the work of Mezirow, notes that Mezirow's starting point

> emerged from a social change paradigm. His starting point was "How do we effect social change" and what kind of individual change is demanded for social change to occur. Mezirow came to the individual through his interest in the social and not the other way around. . . . As a philosophic point, if you don't believe that education has a value to effect change, then you probably shouldn't be an educator.

In Nexus, it appears that effecting social change begins with exploring the reality of societal issues that are not visible or are ignored. The interpretation of this reality is provided by multiple and diverse viewpoints informed by the lived experiences of people met during experiential learning days, or from other Nexus participants. In this way the deep need in South African society for inclusion and social change is laid bare.

8.6.6 Conclusion: The 4 P Model and learner-centred transformative teaching

For a society that is marked by fear and fracture, maintaining brokenness is most easily and unconsciously perpetuated through the building of walls and keeping those we fear away from us. Until we are able to deal with past brokenness, future relationships remain tainted by past experiences. For Mezirow (2012, p. 74) "learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action." For many South Africans the meaning of one's experience is imbued with messages of how different we are from one another, and how differently valued we are by society. In exploring the societal context there is opportunity to develop new meaning structures that may guide future action.

In acknowledging past abuses, present brokenness can be faced and dealt with. Through realising and acknowledging our limitations that are so ably informed by our biographical and historical contexts means that we can begin to act with compassion towards self and others. Nexus could be described as a transformative learning experience that can lead to dealing with past hurts and fracture. But how to foster such learning?

It is Taylor's (2009a) contention that the practice of fostering such learning is illusive and poorly understood. He provides six core elements necessary to frame a transformative learning experience. These are individual experience, promoting critical reflection, dialogue, an holistic orientation, awareness of context and lastly authentic relationships. He tentatively claims that the list of core elements seems complete, but raises the matter of a learner-centred teaching approach as an additional core element. I have argued throughout this section, section 9.6.2, that despite not being overtly designed as a programme that fosters transformative learning these core elements are in fact present in Nexus.

Taylor (2017), drawing from the list of the six core elements mentioned in the previous paragraph, suggests the following three key principles to adopt in a teaching approach that fosters transformative learning: get participants to critically reflect on their experiences and meaning-making; foreground a problem-posing and dialogical pedagogy in place of teaching a "transferal of information" (Taylor, 2017, p. 20); and thirdly to reduce power relationships in teaching and learning interactions. Taylor's 'power dynamic' is interesting because in the scenario he envisages there is a teacher and learners present during the learning event. This is not the case for Nexus.

Taylor (2009a, p. 14) notes that "although it is apparent that many studies have engaged a learner-centered teaching approach, few, if any, have explored in-depth what it looks like in practice, how it is managed, its related challenges, and the implications it has for fostering transformative learning." In Nexus, 'teaching' is about helping learners understand and practice the processes of dialogue and reflection, and reinforcement of learning lies in assessing how well these processes are applied. Thereafter, and throughout the Nexus programme, the responsibility for learning lies with the individual and within the group. As previously noted, the learner becomes the agent of his or her own transformative learning. Perhaps it is the age and level of maturity of the Nexus learner (average age 33 years old) that provides for the autonomy of learning displayed by Nexus participants. In the preceding sub-section I argued that the praxis of leadership begins for many Nexus participants with self-work. Through the sometimes difficult work of resolving disorienting dilemmas it becomes possible that 'apartheid truths' become exposed and interrogated. Relationships with the Other become possible and in some cases celebrated. It is in the willingness to embark on identity work and to humanise the others that leadership-as-practiced guides future actions.

8.7 Conclusion: Relating learning to societal issues and learning about leadership on Nexus

Food writer Michael Pollan has used seven words to simplify the complicated notion of nutrition in today's modern world in order to describe how to eat well (eat food, not too much, mostly plants (Houston Chronicle, 2010). What Pollan has captured in these seven words deals with, amongst others, managing eating disorders, obesity and fad diets: the complexity of the issues present in modern relationships to food is captured in seven easy to remember words. I was similarly provoked to simplify the message about learning on Nexus and its impact. Nexus is an example of a particular leadership that is situated in a particular time in South Africa's history, and is responding to particular needs of this country. I propose that the following five words capture the nature of learning on Nexus as well as its impact: "Know thyself wholly, lead humbly".

The phrase begins with the two words 'know thyself'. I prefer the use of the word 'thyself' rather than 'yourself' because 'thy', the archaic form of the word 'your', conveys a sense of respect and humility. The words of Marcus Aurelius "Look well into thyself; there is a source of strength which will always spring up if thou wilt always look there" (Roman Emperor, A. D. 161-180) bring together two concepts of self-reflection and directed action that Nexus participants refer to. Certainly many Nexus participants came to the realisation that the work of leadership begins with self-work. Because self-awareness is overtly provoked and encouraged on Nexus through experiential learning days, generative dialogue and critically self-reflective assignments, the working group together creates an upwelling in the individual of the sense of 'knowing thyself'. There is acknowledgement that each person is on their own journey of self-discovery, bolstered by each person's own lived experience of their own similar internal journey.

'Knowing thyself' carries with it one's past and at the same time a present understanding of that past. These are the temporal dimensions referred to as a source of learning in generative dialogue. Being curious about the truth of one's self, and exploratory with respect to new relationships, requires courage and a willingness to change. In addition, to look well into one's self, to introspect and hold one's unsurfaced assumptions up to the light requires the luxury of time. Knowing one's self is also facilitated through relationship and dialogue: in the process of deepening understanding and meaning, one's position relative to the issue being explored is exposed and interrogated both by the group and the individual.

"Knowing thyself wholly" provides a rich sense of both self-in-context but also knowing the wholeness of one's self through others. I begin with explaining the self-in-context dimension. As has been described earlier, contemporary South African society is characterised by prevailing lines of fracture, hurt and division. These lines are socioeconomically apparent too given that South Africa is one of the world's most unequal societies.

Nexus provides a strong foundation for learning from each other, for honouring the multiple perspectives offered by other participants, but also those gathered from the 'field' as it were. Mention has been made by participants that once they have experienced the sounds, sights, smells and engagements with people who live in unfamiliar settings during experiential learning days, new understanding emerges of the context but also of the requirements of leadership in multiple contexts. Even those who are visiting familiar places during a Nexus experiential learning day find that the insights offered by those who are seeing it for the first time re-contextualise their sense of that place. Apartheid spatial planning continues to define the places in which South Africans live, along with continuing false notions that there are places which are 'no-go' areas. 'Wholly' learning is therefore informed by the group's

experience of understanding the context of a place. It is the very context that provides the impetus for people to embark on generative dialogue which enriches the multi-faceted nature of understanding context in South Africa.

There is also a temporal dimension to knowing one's self wholly. Nexus is situated in a particular time in South Africa's history. Nexus began in the first decade of the country's new democracy, the heady years of establishing a new rainbow nation. Nexus is now in its 17th year. During this time there have been four general elections, with one State President, Thabo Mbkei, recalled from office, and another, Jacob Zuma, who resigned. During Mbeki's tenure there was HIV-AIDS denialism and xenophobic attacks, under Zuma the Marikana massacre and a political corruption project of state capture. These serve as examples of the myriad of ways in which the lives of millions of poor, marginalised and disempowered in South African society need redress and inclusion. To 'know thyself wholly' is situated in this temporal context.

Another sense of knowing one's self 'wholly' is to be in relationship with others, the notion of ubuntu, and accept more holistic conceptions of knowing. The language used by Nexus participants is absent of notions conveying alienation and Othering which rose to prominence under apartheid, and have proved remarkably tenacious in contemporary South Africa. In place of this language, metaphors which speak to space being redefined are used throughout the data: walls are broken down, refreshing spaces are opened up, tunnel vision is challenged, and eyes are opened. This is the language of liberation and inclusion.

Thus to 'know thyself wholly' is to have self-awareness, and to know that this self-awareness is a lifetime journey of discovering more of self. In addition, the deepening of knowledge of self is deeply embedded in spatial and temporal dimensions of context. Claiming an identity as leader is a hallmark of authentic leadership, and I now discuss what it means to 'lead humbly'.

Leadership lessons in Nexus are built on strong foundations of trust. Within the space of Nexus participants are encouraged to take risks, to move away from their comfort zones, and to be courageous. This space of safety allows Nexus participants to test the nature of relationships with others, particularly across fracture lines typically designated through race. Many participants spoke about the realisation that their assumptions about the Other were strongly challenged whilst on Nexus, with the consequent understanding that 'we are all humans'. It is in the transformed nature of relationships within Nexus that allows participants to establish the same class of relationships outside of Nexus. The humanising of Others is not only confined to Nexus.

Using relational leadership, I situate authentic, learning and humanising leadership as elements under this umbrella concept. Leadership is firmly rooted in its context (Biggart & Hamilton, 1987; Osborn et al., 2002) but further to this I argued that each of authentic, learning and humanising leadership cannot happen in the absence of relationships. At the heart of authentic leadership is that the leader, in being true-to-self, has the best interests of those being led as critically important. In Nexus, the liberation from seeing Others as different to being freed to fully interact with those politically or socio-culturally informed as 'untouchable' is the work of re-humanising of Self and humanising of Other. This can only happen when the nature of relationships is redefined. Learning-leadership is drawn from and informed by examining the leadership actions of social activists (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008). By its very nature, learning-leaders are situated deeply in the context of their followers' needs and concerns. In order to more fully understand requires a leader who listens, and who holds an attitude of wanting to learn from others. As has been said by many Nexus participants, once the threshold of relationship is crossed, there humility, empathy, understanding, 'commonalising' reside.

Understanding of self and of the human nature of others, and of understanding our shared context is what gives rise to 'leading humbly'.

To 'know thyself wholly, lead humbly' is to explain the nature of learning on Nexus and its impact on the participants. These five few words do not convey the amount of courage required to confront one's beliefs and values, to step into the shoes of others and then into the possibility of new relationships, to embrace learning that is often more emotional than cognitive. Leadership is a multifaceted and complex concept that can at times defy definition. For Nexus participants it often begins with self-work that provides new openings to understand the need for leadership and how to humbly hold others when carrying out the actions of leadership.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and closing the case of Nexus

9.1 Introduction

The thesis concludes with an overview of the research study, an integration of the main findings and identifies the contribution of this study to theory, practice and methodology. The four key research questions are discussed. Limitations of and further research emanating from this study are discussed. The chapter and thesis concludes with a personal reflection that has its origins in my late teenage years.

9.2 Purpose of study

This case study of Nexus intended to find out more about how and what participants in this nonformal adult learning programme learnt about themselves and about leadership, particularly within a post-apartheid South African societal context. The study also explored the impact of learning on the personal development of Nexus participants. Prior to starting this study, I became aware of a kind of learning informally reported to me by word of mouth, and through evaluations of Nexus programme events. These reports seemed to stand in contrast to what was reported elsewhere in the business school in evaluations of learning of other classroom-based teaching programmes. Programme evaluations of Nexus events made reference to how participants experienced disruptions in their mental models as well as the effort required by individuals to cope with their learning. In addition, there were frequent mentions made in Nexus programme evaluations about understanding more about the lived experiences under apartheid and its continuing impact in contemporary South Africa, something not often openly referred to or debated in other management and leadership programmes within the business school.

Learning should result in changed behaviour and action, and these factors also seemed to be reported on by Nexus participants in their evaluations. In contrast with other leadership programmes there was also a perception that this is a 'soft' and 'fuzzy' programme that applies only to more socially conscious people (See sections 5.3.5, 5.4.2 and 6.3.2). I was intrigued by a self-facilitated learning model in which programme participants grapple with contentious and potentially divisive content. Lastly, there is inadequate theorising about this form of learning, borne out by the fact that both management and participants have expressed an inability to 'explain' the learning outcomes of Nexus to outsiders. This may be, in part, because the range of learning experienced by Nexus participants is wide and unique to each participant. Also, reflective practices in Nexus are more aligned to process and premise reflections, rather than content reflection (Mezirow, 1985), that is, more focused on answering questions about 'How do I know this?', or "Why do I know this is true?', than 'What is it that I know?'.

In order to answer the questions that learning on Nexus raised for me, a qualitative case study methodology was used. In the next section I discuss my reflections on the methodology employed for this research.

9.3 Reflection on research design and methodology used

Research design and methodology is informed by the key research questions the study intends to answer. The research questions explored two main aspects in Nexus: the nature of learning, with a deeper exploration of the role of emotions and relationships in such learning; and how learning on Nexus related to personal and leadership development and broader societal needs. Because Nexus is a bounded system, and because it uses an unfamiliar pedagogy in comparison with other leadership or executive programmes, case study research was deemed the most appropriate approach to use. The case study of Nexus was an effort to systematically and in depth investigate "a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 4).

Data collected in this case study included a wide variety of documents, observations, semi-structured interviews with both the management team of the programme as well as past Nexus participants. Focus groups with past Nexus participants were conducted, and evaluations and self-reflective assignments generated by current Nexus participants also formed part of the dataset.

During the process of inductively coding the data I noticed that there was a difference in the quality of information contained between the one-on-one interviews in the life story interviews, and that of the data from the focus group discussions. In the one-on-one interviews the flow of the conversation was in part determined by the interview schedule, with small deviations when probing for clarity or because the study informant had provided contextual insights that were deemed in the moment worth exploring further.

However, in the focus group discussions I no longer was in sole control of the direction taken in the conversation. Focus group participants built on reflections, comments and viewpoints offered by others in the discussion. I was able to witness first-hand the dialogic and reflective pedagogy used by Nexus participants. Box 2 contains an email communication to my supervisor in which I noted my observations about the contrast in the data between one-on-one interviews and a group discussion.

The one-on-one interviews, in which I probed the individual's reflections on their learning, were more measured and rationally explained. In the focus group discussions there was laughter, acknowledgement of emotions felt when answering some questions or telling a story and, in

one particular moment, a humanising action when a discussion about Afrikaners was closed with a comment about our common humanity.

Box 2: Email communication to supervisor 28 March 2018

> Dear Vaughn
>
> I'm reading through the second of the focus group discussions and have been struck by how much richer a story it is telling than the life story interviews.
>
> I wonder if a group of relative strangers who come together for a conversation but who understand the principles/rules of dialogue, don't generate richer data when reflecting on their learning in Nexus than in a one-on-one interview? As I read the transcript I can sense that all of the rules of dialogue are in fact present and that this just feels so much more emotive than the more rational feeling of the one on one interviews. It almost feels as if it is the listening ear of more than one person allows for exploration – there is an ebb and flow in this conversation that is missing from the other life story interviews.
>
> Viv

The focus group discussions followed a format similar to that of the working groups in Nexus. After explaining the purpose of this study, obtaining the necessary permissions to collect data and establishing how the evening would run, I began the focus group with a check-in in which participants, relative strangers to each other, introduced themselves. The focus of the discussion was on their learning from Nexus, what they remembered about the pedagogy and what worked and did not work for them on Nexus. At the conclusion there was a check out. Quite a few of the focus group participants remarked on how the focus group discussion reminded them of a Nexus working group session, many thanked me for inviting them to be part of this research and to have the kind of honest conversation particular to Nexus. Several of the focus group participants expressed a desire to be part of such a community again. A parting shot from a participant in the first focus group was that the focus group felt like a Nexus working group, and he did not have to pay for the experience. A few remarked how energised they felt after reconnecting into this community: a community where authenticity and connection hold sway.

Nexus does have an unusual pedagogy for a leadership programme given its focus on processes of becoming through the development of deeper awareness and understanding of self and the country context, rather than of demonstrating mastery of theory and content. The combination of exploration, diversity, dialogue and self-reflection offers programme

participants the opportunity for a safe space to grapple with the complexities in a post-apartheid country that is still grappling with extreme inequalities. Using a case study methodology meant that various learning events could be richly and thickly described, and that the voices of the main protagonists in Nexus could be given prominence. Findings have been written in such a way as to acknowledge and foreground the voices of the research informants.

The study resulted in rich and extensive qualitative data. Sorting and selecting data from well over 500 typewritten pages was a daunting process. What helped with developing a familiarity with the data and with an initial categorising was to accept the invitation from my supervisor to co-present a paper at a conference once I had a set of data to analyse. The anchoring provided by this experience later assisted me greatly with both the analysis and theorising processes.

Certainly the initial plan for data gathering was that focus groups would provide direction for a second phase of data gathering from individuals. Past participants on Nexus were to be probed in one-on-one semi-structured interviews for how and what they had learned about leadership from the programme, and how their participation in Nexus might have impacted their lives and leadership. However, in any research endeavour where there is an exploration of how meaning-making happens at the level of the group, focus groups seem to be the data collection method of choice.

Data were firstly inductively coded to ascertain how Nexus participants reported on the nature of their learning, and its impact on their lives and leadership. A second round of deductive coding was done using AtlasTI. Deductive codes used were derived from the literature on transformative learning theory and research questions. Both inductively and deductively derived codes were shared and interrogated through several iterations with my supervisor.

The data obtained in this study revealed exceedingly positive reporting about learning in Nexus by participants. Research in the interpretivist paradigm means that the phenomenon can only be reported on in the way it was experienced and reported by study participants. As observed earlier, only one study informant, Joe, reported his disappointment with the programme. Even two 'Nexus-sceptics' as identified by the programme managers (Lawrence and Ian) reported that they too, once they had overcome their initial scepticism with the programme and its processes, experienced positive learning outcomes. And yet I know that learning programmes do not result in universal experiences for all participants: there is always a group for whom the learning did not "land" in Carrie's words. There must be contested stories of learning to be told by some Nexus participants. This is an opportunity for further research, and in the discussion about the limitations of this research (section 9.9) I discuss this further.

Assurances about the quality of this research is given through providing rich descriptions of the case and giving prominence to the voices of the study informants. In this way I hope to have achieved reader-determined transferability (Rule & John, 2011). Other measures of trustworthiness of this research, drawn from Rule and John (2011, p. 107), include recording "the fullness and essence of the case reality" to assure credibility, building dependability through "methodological rigour and coherence towards generating findings and case accounts which the research community can accept with confidence", and finally declaring influences and biases brought to bear on this research, as well as disclosing ethical requirements, the confirmability of the case study. Many sources were used to provide the data in this research, some of which (assignments and evaluations) were generated independently of this research.

The choice to use case study research "in order to generate knowledge" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 4) holds merit. Case study has allowed me to generate a theory about learning on Nexus and to theorise a model of leadership that emerges from this leadership programme.

Transformative learning theory provided the theoretical framework to analyse the nature and impact of learning on Nexus. I now provide a brief overview of key concepts and emerging directions in the evolution of the theory.

9.4 Transformative learning theory: the theoretical framework

In 1981, Mezirow proposed a critical theory of adult learning and education (Mezirow, 1981), initially named perspective transformation, but now more broadly understood as transformative learning theory. Its focus was on adult education, and central to this theory is the construction of meaning structures by adults in order to better understand and interpret their experiences. "Meanings emerge out of human interaction as rules or habits of action" (Mezirow, 1971, p. 4). Some 40 years later, Mezirow noted that "a defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 73). The body of work that now comprises transformative learning theory still holds as central the ability of individuals to more truthfully and reliably construct meaning from their experiences, often through interaction with others, in order to make informed decisions that guide future actions.

The understanding and ordering of the meaning of our experience takes place within various meaning structures, of which a meaning perspective, the "structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions" (Mezirow, 2000a, p. 17) provides the "justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings. [These beliefs, values and feelings] depend on the context – biographical, historical, cultural – in which they are embedded" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 73). Meaning perspectives that are uncritically

assimilated constrain our worldview and skew our reality through distortions of thought and perceptions.

A psychodevelopmental view of adulthood holds that there is continuous, incremental and progressive growth. Transformative learning is the process of meaning perspectives expanding and becoming clarified which results in a more inclusive and discriminating worldview. Transformative learning theorists posit that such development includes epistemological change, an appreciation for learning through relationships and in more holistic ways of knowing. Recent neurological studies have shown that "the brain structure actually changes during the learning process" (Taylor, 2017, p. 21). In transformative learning the neurobiological approach submits that discomfort precedes discovery, that emotive, kinesthetic and sensory experiences reinforce learning, and such learning is situated in the experiences, needs and interest of the learner (Taylor, 2017). These views of transformative learning view the individual as the unit of analysis.

Transformative learning that takes into account both social and individual change is explained through a social-emancipatory view. Based on the work of Freire (1970/2012), this view of transformative learning maintains that the individual becomes critically conscious of the world they live in and, through "demythicizing reality" (Taylor, 2017, p. 20), social transformation becomes possible: "[men and women] come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1970/2012, p. 83).

In Chapter 3 the development of transformative learning theory over time was explored in detail. There are three main waves (Gunnlaugson, 2008) in the development of transformative learning theory. In the first wave Mezirow proposed and developed key concepts within transformative learning, mostly to do with what structures were being transformed, and the incidents and processes that lead to a transformative learning experience. The first wave is also marked by a period of many critiques of the theory, and some modifications made by Mezirow in response to the critiques.

A second wave in the theory development was marked in the main by other ways of knowing which progressed Mezirow's more rational conception of transforming meaning structures. During this phase there was an increase in divergent explanations of transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory is an elegant theory that in accessible and sensible ways explains how people do come to change their worldview. The explanation resonates with those who either because of epochal moments or through experiencing disorienting dilemmas know and feel that the way they view the world is fundamentally changed. However, as Newman (2012a) pointed out, not every good learning is in and of itself transformative. The danger was that all learning was being described as transformative.

To this end the calls for unifying the theory of transformative learning have been responded to by Gunnlaugson (2005, 2008) and Hoggan (2016a, 2016b). There have been calls to see transformative learning theory as a metatheory as distinct from Mezirow's theory, which Hoggan proposes should be called 'Perspective Transformation Theory'. Hoggan has proposed the following definition for transformative learning: "Transformative learning refers to processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016a, p. 71).

This thesis drew on the contributions from theorists throughout the theory's development to explain how individuals significantly and irreversibly experience, conceptualise and interact with the world, that learning that promotes a change in "the form of a person's meaning-making system" (Berger, 2004, p. 340).

9.5 Leadership theories

Initial analysis of the data from the focus groups led to the realisation that participants were reporting fairly extensively on their leadership practices. This was an unexpected turn of events for me as a researcher of adult education and having no familiarity with leadership theories beyond what I may have read in popular literature. But in order to engage with this data it then became necessary to review the academic literature on selected leadership theories. This is a vast literature with a long history. The review provided me with a means to engage with terms and concepts about leadership used in the data. More recent theories on leadership seemed to fit with the data being reported by Nexus participants.

Given the emphasis in the data about self-work undertaken by Nexus participants, authentic leadership (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Banks et al., 2016; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008) provided a useful lens through which to view this data. The work of Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) on how business schools could humanise leadership brought in relational dimensions that were reported in the data but, more significantly, resonated with the frequent references made by Nexus participants to a process of humanising the Other. Given the leaning towards a particular form of leadership required in the broader South African social setting, learning-leadership was a further model used to analyse the data.

Authentic, humanising and learning-leadership are all models that respond to contextual influences on the leadership exercised and are strongly rooted in relationships.

9.6 Discussion of results

9.6.1 The nature of learning in Nexus

Participants on Nexus learn about leadership through an experiential approach, and are invited to think more critically about the social and political context of their leadership. The lack of taught content is replaced by a focus on taught processes of reflection and dialogue. There is critical engagement with multiple viewpoints provided through the diversity of Nexus participants' experiences. In summarising their learning on the Nexus programme, study respondents described it as non-academic in contrast with their other previous experiences of learning at HEIs. Such learning requires that participants are actively engaged, even to the point of feeling forced into some of this learning.

During experiential learning days, or in their working groups, participants may experience what are variously referred to as momentary disconnections, or being in the crucible, or cognitive dissonance. These events are what Mezirow would term disorienting dilemmas, and Jarvis called disjuncture: instances when the learner becomes conscious that the in-the-moment experience is not supported by their existing frame of reference. Examples of disorienting dilemmas that are linked to participation on Nexus were richly described by some study respondents.

Learning on Nexus is described as deeply personal and individualised. There is also an acknowledgement by the Nexus programme management team that the learning process can be either delayed or not started during the time of participation on Nexus. Transformative learning is evident in that assumptions are re-examined and found to be worth interrogating.

However, transformative learning theory does not acknowledge the significant role that context plays in why and how people can learn. Brookfield contends that it is in examining the very context, social and political, that provides the disorienting dilemma. Nexus, in real-world settings, invites participants to deepen their understanding of the many political and social factors that impact society, and additionally explores the understanding of these factors through multiple points of view. Participants report on deepening their understanding why inclusion and fairness is required, and this aligns with critical adult learning theory.

9.6.2 The roles of emotions and relationships

That transformative learning on Nexus engages emotions is not in question. The data is laden with phrases that speak to the many emotions elicited during participation on Nexus. Emotions are triggered during experiential learning days, in the working groups, as well as through reflective assignments. Phrases and words used to describe the role that affect played in this

learning include: not being able to escape the feeling; hurt; shame; crying; experiencing an emotional roller-coaster; and that having these emotional responses is validated as a way of learning. One participant described the programme as being visceral.

Although study respondents described their perceptions of the teaching approach as touchy-feely, or wishy-washy, or having a focus on softer issues, many were surprised at how difficult this learning became. As in the previous section, there is a link between affective learning and active engagement in the learning process: a view of a more holistic approach to transformative learning.

A predominant theme of learning focuses on learning through relationships. The nature of relationships is changed through humanising the Other and, in so doing, barriers and divisions are broken down. The building of trust across previously held divisions becomes possible, and in this way mistrust is transformed.

Trust emerges in the course of telling and hearing life-stories, as well as engaging the practices of dialogue. Nexus participants are instructed to focus on the stories of their lived- experiences rather than offering their opinions, an interpretation of an event of their experience. In addition, being able to tell one's life stories and hear the life stories of others knowing that the group is willingly suspending their judgment and listening 'with emptiness' means that trust is built on courage, honesty, authenticity and the willingness of each person to be vulnerable.

Learning about others is in tension with learning about self. There is an emerging awareness that meaning perspectives are unique to each individual, their context and life history. Realising this becomes possible through trustful relationships with the Other.

9.6.3 Learning as related to personal development, broader lives and history

Mezirow (1978) described the process of thinking about the very meaning of a situation in a new way as a perspective transformation. Using a psychocritical approach Mezirow contends that transformative learning takes place when the individual's frame of reference is consciously changed through critical reflection on assumptions. These assumptions are uncritically formed in a socio-cultural context. Participants in the Nexus leadership programme made frequent reference to how the ongoing influence of apartheid continues to impact their meaning perspectives. Nexus provides an opportunity for participants to interrogate why these meaning perspectives still persist today. For some study respondents the 'truth' that not all people are created equal is challenged. This perspective transformation allows the individual to become more inclusive and discriminating in integrating their experiences, and then to act on their new understanding.

Some Nexus participants reported that their year on Nexus was life-changing, and that their view of their world was fundamentally altered. There was recognition that their truths, perceptions and issues were unique to them, and that challenging their assumptions took a great deal of effort. One study respondent reported that she became a better person in general and that she was a better person in the workplace and developed better relationships with family members. In making this statement she recognises that learning about leadership had broader ramifications in her personal life.

Nexus overtly states that participants will be guided in their own journey to a sense of agency. For Mezirow (1989), social action is the outcome of learning that social practices can be changed in order to create "a society in which adults can be enfranchised to participate fully." Some Nexus participants reported that they had either changed the type of work they were doing, the way they lead in their workplace, or consciously pursued entirely new avenues of work.

9.6.4 Learning as related to societal needs and leadership development

Nexus participants situate their learning about leadership within the broader country societal context. There is acknowledgement that the work of the leader begins with self-work, and this self-work begins with exploring relationships with those previously thought of as Other, and facilitated through generative dialogue and critical self-reflection. Growth as a leader begins through having core beliefs challenged, and accepted orthodoxies questioned within a real world setting.

Developing a deeper understanding of social and political factors at play in South African society provides an impetus to find innovative solutions to some of the problems that the poor, marginalised and disempowered face on an ongoing basis.

Learning about leadership on Nexus that takes a critical social science stance is summarised in the following sentence: Know thyself wholly, lead humbly. This sentence is explained more fully in Section 8.6.5 but worth repeating here in that the knowing of self is not only that the leader understands their identity, but that this identity is informed by a temporal context, and through others. The leadership theories used to analyse how Nexus participants explain their leadership, that of authentic, humanising and learning-leadership, were clustered together as relational leadership. This too refers to knowing oneself wholly.

9.7 Contribution of study

9.7.1 Practical contribution

Nexus is a leadership programme that places emphasis on learning about self, context and

self-in-context rather than deepening a theoretical understanding of leadership. For leaders in general, but particularly in this country and other post-conflict environments, fracture lines and lack of social stability add a level of complexity in the role required by leadership. In addition, we live in a time of post-truth where "new social media and its propensity to disseminate fake news through Facebook, Google and Twitter, and thereby to create a 'bubble world' where algorithmically selected news sources simply reinforce existing prejudices thus compromising the capacity for moral thinking" (Peters, 2017, p. 564) make the search for the deeper understanding of an issue more difficult to discern. The combination of fake news and doubtful mental models informed by apartheid thinking is a toxic mix for leaders. Nexus opens the door to challenging habitual ways of thinking within contemporary news-saturated lives. The pedagogy of Nexus, or the prescribed process it establishes for learners, has implications for other programme designs that look to foster transformative learning within complex social systems.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Taylor (2017) has questioned a teaching approach that engages learners in their own transformative learning experience. In Nexus, the responsibility for learning is placed on the shoulders of those learning: participants gain support from dialogue coaches and the programme managers, but the expectation is that they will learn from other participants, and they will have to make a contribution to the learning of others. To this end, institutions must believe in the capacity and ability of learners to be sufficiently committed to and curious about the broader environment in which learning happens.

In Section 7.2.4 (on p. 206) I noted that:

> … whilst there is acknowledgement with the Nexus management team that emotions play a role in learning, and that sometimes the emotions that can be provoked need to be more carefully handled and scaffolded, there is an absence in the data about a deliberate strategy to bring emotions into learning.

A recommendation for practice is that the dynamics and role of emotions through, for instance, provocation and management may need to be more explicitly owned and planned for.

Teaching about leadership in business schools has been called into question by Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015). They propose that because workplaces are identity spaces it behoves business schools to help leaders view themselves and others as relational human *beings* (my italics). Nexus goes some way in assisting the leader to embark on the self-work that may be required in order to develop a humility to learn from others. In South Africa this is highly relevant given the lived or vicariously experienced reality of apartheid.

Goal 10 of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is to reduce inequalities. One of the targets itemised in this goal is that "by 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status" (United Nations, n.d.). South Africa has political inclusion, but as noted in the first chapter of this thesis, the hard work of economic and social inclusion is only now beginning. Nexus provides the means for its participants to switch from notional assent to real assent as described by Dix (2016); to shift from a theoretical understanding of the need for inclusion in this country to being able to describe the faces and lived realities of those crying out for inclusion.

9.7.2 Theoretical contribution

It is possible to foster a transformative learning experience that highlights expressive, in addition to rational, ways of knowing. This research explored what role emotions and relationships played in learning on Nexus, and both were found to make a significant contribution to how Nexus participants self-reported on their learning. The exploration of making-meaning in post-apartheid South Africa was both catalysed and carried by emotions. There is a matter of fact acceptance by participants that emotional ways of knowing contributed to their meaning-making.

In the same way relationships with those perceived as Other became possible in Nexus through a process named as 'humanising' by programme participants. Being able to forge new relationships across previously forbidden lines defined predominantly by race enabled participants to let go of having "to randomly [hate] an entire group of people because of all these slights that really has nothing to do … with who this person is" (Sammy-Jane, FGD2, Feb. 24, 2016).

Nexus provides a safe space for participants to enter into a prescribed process of reflection, dialogue and experiential learning. The structure of the programme provided a supportive learning environment that meant that because of feeling forced to, participants moved towards their learning edges. Support was provided in the main by redefined relationships and an honouring of the role of emotions in their learning. Taylor and Cranton (2012, p. 562) identify this as a "pedagogy of coercion". It would appear that for the participants who remained involved in the programme, the resistance they felt in dealing with their challenges and discomfort was in some way mitigated by relationships on Nexus and the invitation to vulnerability.

This research focused on two learning outcomes, namely how Nexus informed learning about leadership, and what impact learning on Nexus had personally, professionally and societally.

Historian Thomas Carlyle in 1840 proposed that leadership is enacted by the “Great Man” (sic) and this theory contends that leadership is only possible through heroic, charismatic and visionary men. In this exploration of how learning about leadership was reported it would seem that many Nexus participants laid claim to not ‘knowing it all’: there is a measure of tentativeness about what they hold as their truths, particularly in acknowledging that there may be other equally valid truths.

This research also contributes to furthering an understanding of how a sociocultural transformative learning experience based on a deep engagement with the social world can promote equitability and social inclusion. Citing Brookfield’s (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012, p. 523) four approaches for teaching for sociocultural transformative learning, Nexus helps participants to realise how social and economic forces impact individual experiences, to engage in broader questions of how to create an equitable and inclusive society, to actively promote inclusive conversations through being open to multiple perspectives, and to take a more critical view of society in general and one’s role in that society.

9.7.3 Methodological contribution

The research design used data gathered from both past (focus group discussions and life story interviews) and present (assignments, evaluations and working group) participants on the programme. This provided both retrospective and introspective views of how participants reported their learning on Nexus.

In addition, data were collected from individuals and within group settings. As noted previously, the group reflections provided an added dimension of information in that the dialogic processes as practiced by Nexus participants could be observed and noted.

The assignments and programme evaluations provided data that was independent of my probing and observations to answer the research questions. These documents provided an insight into the perceptions and reflections of Nexus participants in-the-moment of their programme.

Thus I was able to obtain views singly and collectively, retrospectively and introspectively.

9.8 Limitations

A major limitation of this research is the researcher’s positionality. Although not seen by those in GIBS or by Nexus participants as having a vested interest in the success of the programme, my status as a researcher of adult learning within GIBS needs interrogation with respect to this study. I noted in the previous section that the reports of learning by Nexus participants present a very rosy picture of a transformative learning programme. I looked at the programme

evaluations (not extensively reported on in this study) to see if I could find dissenting views. The views expressing dissatisfaction are very granular: didn't like a speaker, didn't like the length of answers required for the assignments, and didn't have time to do the readings. When I looked to see how they were reporting their experience of learning, at worst they express confusion about what exactly they are learning. Most comments reflect an excitement at what is being discovered, at the creation of new spaces.

Another limitation of the researcher's positionality is that of race. This thesis has extensively noted how race impacts the lived experiences of South Africans. As a White person who interviewed participants from other races I may have been unaware of how my race either impacted participants' willingness or ability to fully share their feelings or insights, or my capacity to interpret the meanings of their spoken and written words.

A further limitation of this research is that, except for Joe (FGD2), all of the research participants referred to how they had experienced transformations in meaning structures because they had been on Nexus. Despite inviting between 24 and 30 Nexus participants to be part of one of three focus group discussions, a total of 12 attended. Invitations for interviews to those purposively selected because they had stopped their participation on Nexus were ignored. Thus the data has a missing voice from those who chose not to continue their participation on the Nexus programme.

It may be that invitations to participate in this research were not accepted because of timing, pressures at work, or no interest to participate in research in general, but it may also be a reflection that the people who did accept the invitation have a predisposition towards collective meaning-making and were intrigued enough to further engage in a dialogic process of understanding Nexus for themselves. It may also be that the kind of leadership that Nexus promotes, an authentic, humanising learning-leadership may stand in contrast to how the participant views their style of leadership.

Another 'missing voice' is that of the group of people who recommended Nexus as a leadership programme for their employees. Obtaining views from those who are sceptical about the learning they gained through Nexus, and from those in organisations who recommended Nexus, would provide a more rounded view of the impact of Nexus.

This research is silent on the ethics of fostering such transformative learning, particularly with regard to those who were reported to experience great turmoil during working groups or on experiential learning days. Reports about the reasons for such dramatic departures from the programme have not been explored in this research, and this remains a limitation of the study.

9.9 Further research

At the conclusion of developing this thesis I have been left with several questions that could form the basis of further research. Two avenues for further research derive from the limitations of this research, discussed in the previous section. This research, conducted in an exploratory and interpretivist paradigm, has yielded overwhelmingly positive reports about learning on Nexus, and is also well aligned to transformative learning theory. The voices of those who did not experience the same positive learning (except for Joe) are missing from this data. Research that explores why those who enrolled in Nexus but did not complete the programme bears further scrutiny. Another set of missing voices is that of organisations that nominated and sponsored people to attend Nexus. This research could deepen the understanding of the impact, or not, of Nexus on employees, and how this learning impacted organisational outcomes.

A second limitation of this research has to do with matters of ethics raised in opening up what might be painful or deeply disturbing memories through learning on Nexus. There is an openly stated intention on Nexus to promote learning that results in people becoming agents of change once they have attended the programme. The question that could be asked is how ethical is it to promote a kind of learning that possibly disrupts and upsets the lives of the learners? Again, such a question could be fully explored in further research.

One question that emerged from this research has to do with the nature of relationships fostered by Nexus. Given South Africa's strongly divided and destructive past, is it possible that a programme like Nexus could act as an ongoing Truth and Reconciliation process? This process of inclusion through dealing with past hurts bears further study.

A further opportunity for research on Nexus is through using critical theory or critical race theory perspectives. There is opportunity to explore, within a critical paradigm study, in what ways, if any, power, race and justice may impact learning on Nexus.

This research provides a model of learning on Nexus that proposes nine components. Are all components essential, are there more that could be added?

Finally, there is a preponderance of qualitative studies that explore both transformative learning and how to foster such learning. This research could provide the basis for a quantitative study that tests the hypotheses of the positive effect of emotions and relationships in transformative learning.

9.10 Conclusion

My final year as a learner at secondary school was in 1975, a time of the Cold War and firmly-entrenched apartheid. On June 16, 1976 the Soweto Youth Uprising was to change the socio-political landscape of South Africa. For final examination at school we were required to complete a portfolio of work for the subject English. This portfolio was to comprise self-selected thematically organised poems, book reviews and original writing. I remember finding the poem *Walls* in a book *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum Imisindo Yesigubhu Sesikhumba Senkomo* by Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali, a Soweto born poet.

The poem reads

Man is
The great wall builder
The Berlin Wall
The Wailing Wall of Jerusalem
But the wall
most impregnable
Has a moat
Flowing with fright
Around his heart

A wall without windows
For the spirit to breeze through

A wall
without a door
for love to walk in.

My portfolio was built around the theme of the ways in which we build separations around us, and find reasons to not reach out to others. At that stage of my life I am not sure whether that reaching out to others would have included people from other races. I probably held a more bubbled-view of ways in which I saw how physical walls such as the Berlin Wall and the Wailing Wall made manifest the cruelty of separation and hate. And as I reflect on the work of Nexus, and the work of this thesis that seeks to theorise learning on Nexus, it suddenly struck me that I have come full circle.

In Mtshali's poem mention is made of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, a nearly half-kilometre of wall built in 19 BCE, and site of great holiness for the Jewish people. The durability of this

wall over millennia stands as a stark reminder for the Jewish people of what has been lost. At the time of the publication of *Walls* in 1971 the Berlin Wall, which divided a city and where many people lost their lives in trying to escape over the wall, seemed to me in 1975 to have the same sense of durability as the Western Wall. But, in the same decade as the dismantling of apartheid, the Berlin Wall was demolished. Sadly Mtshali's view that man is a great wall builder still rings true: President Donald Trump has promised to build a wall separating the United States from Mexico to keep out unwanted immigrants; and the Israeli government has since 2000 embarked on the building of a 708 kilometre West Bank barrier or wall in order to secure occupied territories.

For Nexus participants, whose reporting on learning on this programme is imbued with images of bubbles being popped, windows to look out through, walls being broken, losing tunnel vision, there seems to be a greater story of release and liberation: a form of life-altering learning. Perhaps the moat around the heart can be filled with new possibilities not conceived of before participation on Nexus.

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APPENDIX 1: Ethics documentation

Ethics Certificate: Protocol reference number HH/0313/015D

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

6 May 2015

Mrs Vivienne Susan Spooner 208527796
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Spooner

Protocol reference number: HSS/0313/015D
Project title: Exploring nonformal adult learning in a business school leadership programme: A case study of the Nexus programme

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 10 April 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Dr VM John
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
Cc School Administrator: Ms T Khumalo/ Ms B Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** singhsp@ukzn.ac.za / snymsem@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

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100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

Gatekeeper permission

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

19 November 2014

AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, Shireen Chengadu, consent to the conduct of this study involving GIBS in relation to the said research project: Exploring non-formal adult learning in a business school leadership programme: A case study of the Nexus programme **[ethical clearance reference number to be provided].**

I/We understand that no real name will be used in any public report, unless authorized by the participants and that participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences for their status at the university or in the community.

Chengadu ..... 19 November 2014 .....

Ms S Chengadu **Date**

Executive Director: Centre for Leadership and Dialogue

APPENDIX 2: Informed consent documents

Invitation to participate in research

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION LETTER/ FOR INTERVIEW, FOCUS GROUP AND QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANTS

1. Study title and Researcher Details

- **Department**: Adult Education
- **Project title**: "Exploring non-formal adult learning in a business school leadership programme: A case study of the Nexus programme"
- **Principal investigator**: Vivienne Spooner 076 xxx email address provided

---

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in this educational study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with other members if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to find out more about the nature of learning in a leadership programme such as Nexus. I'd like to know more about how the particular pedagogic designs of this programme influences participants' understanding, and how this might impact the design of other leadership programmes.

4. Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen because of your experiences in participating in the Nexus programme. The study will conduct individual and group interviews of participants, faculty and staff who have some knowledge of the Nexus programme activities at GIBS.

5. Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, I will give you this information sheet to keep and I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawal from the study will not have any negative consequences for anyone choosing to do this.

Address: Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209

Website: http://cae.org.za

6. What will happen to you if you take part?

I will mostly ask questions of individuals (for key informants) and groups of Nexus participants, faculty and staff (for focus group discussions), who agree to participate and to answer questions regarding the Nexus Programme at GIBS.

The meetings with you will last one hour. I will tape record the discussions with your permission and will also jot down some notes. I will also conduct some observations of the Nexus programme at GIBS

The study will take place between April 2015 and November 2015

7. Will your taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes, I will not include your name or your address in this study. I will do this so that nobody can recognise you from the information that you will give. Additionally you are free to select your own pseudonym for purposes for reporting in this study

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The final research report will be made available at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The results of this study may also be presented at a conference and published in a journal. I will not write your name or address in any report or book.

9. Who is organising and funding the research?

The University of KwaZulu-Natal.

10. Who has reviewed the study?

The University of KwaZulu Natal – Research Funding Committee and Ethics Committee.

11. Contact(s) for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project please contact:

Professor Julia Preece: Professor of Adult Education at the Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Education Building, Pietermaritzburg, Email: preecej@ukzn.ac.za

HSSREC Research Office (Ms P. Ximba, Tel: 031 260 3587, Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you!

Name: ..... Date: …….....

N.B. Please sign the attached form if you consent to taking part in this study.

DECLARATION

I…….… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES	NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES	NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES	NO

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

…… ……

Informed consent document

Centre for Adult Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg Campus
KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Vivienne Spooner. I am an Adult Education PhD candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

I am interested in learning more about the nature of learning in the Nexus programme at GIBS, University of Pretoria. Your cohort forms part of my case studies. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at knowing more about the nature of earning experienced by participants in in the Nexus programme.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Video equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: spooners@telkomsa.net

Cell: +27 xxx

My supervisor is Dr Vaughn John who is located at the Centre for Adult Education, Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Phone number: +27 33 260 5069

Contact details: email: johnv@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

Prof. Julia Preece

Professor of Adult Education

Tel: +27 [0]33 260 5981

Email: preecej@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I…… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:
Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES NO

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

…… ……

APPENDIX 3: Interview questions

Planning for interviews and focus group discussions

Key Research Questions

KRQ 1

What is the nature of learning on the Nexus programme?

KRQ 2

What roles, if any, do emotion and relationships play in Nexus participants' learning?

KRQ 3

How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to personal development, broader lives and histories of learners?

RQ 3 a

How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to personal development of learners?

RQ 3 b

How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to broader lives of learners?

RQ 3 c

How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to histories of learners?

KRQ 4

How does learning on the Nexus programme relate to societal needs and leadership development?

Data collection

Phase One: Semi structured interviews of Nexus programme managers and coordinators

Draft questions	Theory	Research questions
Tell me more about yourself – anything you'd be comfortable sharing with me	World views and paradigms	None - exploratory
What is your understanding of the purpose of Nexus?		KRQ 1
What role are you playing in Nexus? How does this role support Nexus' purpose you just spoke about?		KRQ 1 KRQ 3
What challenges do you experience on Nexus?		None - exploratory
What achievements have you experienced on Nexus?		None - exploratory
What perspectives can you offer about Nexus?		None - exploratory

Phase Two: Focus group discussions with Participants

Prompts	Theory	Research questions
In what year did you participate on Nexus? What brought you into Nexus?	None	None - exploratory
What were the big national events or debates in the year you did Nexus? In wat ways, if any, did Nexus affect your understanding of these events? In what ways did participation on Nexus affect your self-awareness and understanding of SA society?	Critical reflection	KRQ 4 KRQ 3
What events stood out for you on Nexus? Why? What was the most important things you learnt on the Nexus programme? How did these make you feel?	Disorienting dilemmas	KRQ 1 KRQ2 KRQ 4
Which people stood out for you on Nexus? Why?	Role of relationships	KRQ 2
Which parts of the Nexus programme did you enjoy most? Why? How did these make you feel? Which parts did you enjoy least? Why? How did these make you feel? Tell me more about your experiences in the working groups? Were there ever moments of conflict that you can recall?	Validating discourse through dialogue Self-examination Role of affect	KRQ 1 KRQ 2
Tell me more about the ELDs and your experiences of these	Disorienting dilemmas	KRQ 1 KRQ 2 KRQ 3 KRQ 4
In what ways, if any, did Nexus affect the way you interacted with your own families, close friends and communities? If so, was this only during the time of Nexus that you were affected? Tell me more		KRQ 3 KRQ 4

How did you tell others about your learning on Nexus?	Transformative process of learning	KRQ 1
Did being a part of Nexus change anything about how you understood the world and yourself? Did your participation on Nexus change anything about how you saw yourself as a leader/person, parent etc.? If so, in what ways?	Provisional trying on of new roles	KRQ 3 KRQ4
Did your participation on Nexus change anything about the ways in which you saw yourself as a participant in the South African story? If so, in which ways? Did involvement in Nexus change the way other people saw you? Give an example? Was there resistance from anyone?	Reflective action	KRQ 4
When you think back on Nexus did any learning take place? Can you identify moments of reflection/dialogue/with whom?	New mental models, new perspectives? How did these happen?	KRQ 1 KRQ 2
Did you get involved in any social projects then or now while you were on Nexus or afterwards? If so, why did you take this action? Why did you respond in this way?	Reflective action Realization of agency	KRQ 4
On a piece of card: Develop a single sentence advertisement for Nexus Perhaps invite some people to put up their cards on the wall and explain them.		

Phase Three: Life stories with key participants

Prompt questions	Theory	Research questions
Where and when were you born?		
Please share some stories with me about your upbringing – your home life, schooling and higher education, your interests and passions. I can prompt you with some more structured questions		
FAMILY		
Tell me about your parents and their education		
Tell me about your siblings and their education		
CHILDHOOD		
Friends Schooling. Where and why?		
Role models/ best teacher?		
Dreams and ambitions		
POST-SCHOOL		
Education – where and why?		
First job		
ADULT LIFE		
Relationships/marriage?		
Children/family?		
Work?		
Study		
Community involvement, sport		
Challenges		
Bucket list		
Other		

NEXUS AND YOU		
When?		
Why?		
Impact of programme, positive or negative?		
Change in how you see yourself?		
Change in how you see others?		
Impact of Nexus in place of work?		
Impact of Nexus in personal space?		
To what extent would you say that trust was part of your learning on Nexus? Why would you say so? How do you define the word 'trust'?	Identification of emotions and/or relationships	KRQ 1 KRQ 2
I have been told that Nexus is a safe space to have challenging conversations. Do you agree or disagree? Why do you say so?		

APPENDIX 4: Coding notes

FOR NOTING:

The categorisation of themes into the what, why and how of learning reminded me of this point made in my literature review about perspective transformation

Reflection is the "process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 104), and Mezirow contends it is the central dynamic in the transformation of meaning structures. Reflecting on the assumptions of content (what is known) or process of problem solving may result in changed meaning schemes, but premise reflection, or critical reflection on problematic taken-for-granted assumptions (how and why what is known) lead to perspective transformation.

Themes	**Categorisation**	Past Nexus participants Group	Current Nexus participants Group	Past Nexus participants Individual	Current Nexus participants Individual
	Data sources	People	People	People	Documents
	Strategy used	Focus groups	Working group	Life stories	Evaluations Assignments Drawings
HOW LEARNING HAPPENS Process of problem solving	**Codes**				
Evidence of dialogue in practice (I observed this)	ObsDia	PGObsDia	CGObsDia	PIObsDia	CIObsDia
Reference to practices of dialogue (Reported by participants)	DiaPrac	PGDiaPrac	CGDiaPrac	PIDiaPrac	CIDiaPrac
Reflections (I thought about this)	Reflection	PGReflection	CGReflection	PIReflection	CIReflection
Diversity as influence on learning (I learnt from others who are not similar to me)	Diversity	PGDiversity	CGDiversity	PIDiversity	CIDiversity
Power of stories (Learnt through stories of others' experiences)	Stories	PGStories	CGStories	PIStories	CIStories
Opening and closing (I learnt because eyes opened, walls broken down etc.)	Space	PGSpace	CGSpace	PISpace	CISpace
Context- present and past (I learnt because I have another view of the context)	Context	PGContext	CGContext	PIContext	CIContext
Emotions (The context or dialogue raised feelings of anger or hurt)	Emotions	PGEmotions	CGEmotions	PIEmotions	CIEmotions

Relationships (I learnt because I have a relationship built on trust with this person)	Relations	PGRelations	CGRelations	PIRelations	CIRelations
Trust (I learnt because I could trust the process)	Trust	PGTrust	CGTrust	PITrust	CITrust
Formal versus non-formal learning (about vs being)	FvsNF	PGFvsNF	CGFvsNF	PIFvsNF	CIFvsNF
WHAT LEARNING HAPPENS Content, what is 'seen behaviour or change'?					
Humanising the other/connection/inclusion	Human	PGHuman	CGHuman	PIHuman	CIHuman
Leadership	Leader	PGLeader	CGLeader	PILeader	CILeader
Learning about others	Others	PGOthers	CGOthers	PIOthers	CIOthers
Creating impact	Impact	PGImpact	CGImpact	PIImpact	CIImpact
Unlearning	Unlearn	PGUnlearn	CGUnlearn	PIUnlearn	CIUnlearn
WHY LEARNING HAPPENS Reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions					
Pedagogy	Pedagogy	PGPedagogy	CGPedagogy	PIPedagogy	CIPedagogy
Being forced to …	Force	PGForce	CGForce	PIForce	CIForce
Courage to try	Courage	PGCourage	CGCourage	PICourage	CICourage
Disruption and disturbance	Disturb	PGDisturb	CGDisturb	PIDisturb	CIDisturb
Self	Self	PGSelf	CGSelf	PISelf	CISelf
Different now	DifferentNow	PGDifferentNow	CGDifferentNow	PIDifferentNow	CIDifferentNow
NEXUS					
Why do Nexus?	Motivation	PGMotivation	CGMotivation	PIMotivation	CIMotivation
What is Nexus?	WhatIsNx	PGWhatIsNx	CGWhatIsNx	PIWhatIsNx	CIWhatIsNx
Reification of Nexus	Reification	PGReification	CGReification	PIReification	CIReification
NOT SURE					
Vlakplaas	Vlakplaas	PGVlakplaas	CGVlakplaas	PIVlakplaas	CIVlakplaas

Deductive codes used

Research questions:

1. What is the nature of learning in the Nexus programme?
2. What roles, if any, do emotion and relationships play in learning of participants on the Nexus programme?
3. How does learning in the Nexus programme relate to personal development, broader lives and histories of learners?
4. How does participation in the Nexus programme relate to societal needs and leadership development?

Deductive codes to provide answers to RESEARCH QUESTIONS

	Codes	**Description**
1.1	RQ_Emotions_felt	Report on personal emotions
1.2	RQ_Emotions_seen	Report on emotions noted in others
2.1	RQ_Relationships_mine	Personal account of relationships on Nexus
2.2	RQ_Relationships_observed	Account of relationships amongst others on Nexus
3.1	RQ_Impact: personal - self	Impact personal – reports how self has changed
3.2	RQ_Impact personal at work	Impact personal – reports how things changed at work
3.3	RQ_Impact personal at home	Impact personal – reports how things changed at home
3.4	RQ_Impact - societal	Impact societal – reports how things changed more broadly
3.5	RQ_Impact leadership	Reports on how leadership impacted

Final code list

Various overlaps between two sets of codes. The following list attempts to consolidate both sets in order to answer RQs and to see how the theory is extended

	Codes	Description
1	A_Boundaries	Reference to boundaries, blockages, racial/gender/religious differences
2	A_Danger of not doing self-work	Risk of being unaware of who we are when in positions of leadership
3	A_Growth	Uses word 'growth'
4	A_Healing	Process of healing
5	A_Humanising	Human or humanising used in quote
6	A_Identity	Identity used in quote
7	A_Inclusion	Sharing, collective solving, seeing the other, connecting, trust to, collaborate, mutuality
8	A_Journey	Uses word 'journey'
9	A_Language	Uses word 'vocabulary' or 'language'
	Codes	Description
10	A_Life-changing	Uses 'life-changing' or 'transformative'
11	A_New democracy	Reflections on working or social interactions 1994-2000
12	A_Ongoing learning	No end date to learning
13	A_Pain	Uses word 'pain'
14	A_Protected	Protection from apartheid system
15	A_Race	Uses word 'race' or coded descriptions of races
16	A_Self-work	Dealing with ways of being that no longer match new meaning
17	A_Stability	Report of long term learning
18	A_Woundedness	Past and present ways in which hurts manifest in the person
19	RQ_Emotions_felt	Report on personal emotions (I felt)
20	RQ_Emotions_seen	Report on emotions noted in others (They felt)
21	RQ_Impact: personal - self	Impact personal – reports how self has changed
22	RQ_Impact_At work	Impact personal – reports how things changed at work
23	RQ_Impact_Home interactions	Impact personal – reports how things changed at home
24	RQ_Impact_leadership	Reports on how leadership impacted
25	RQ_Impact_Social action	What activism is reported
26	RQ_Impact_societal	Impact societal – reports how things changed more broadly
27	RQ_Relationships_building	Actions that lead to building of relationships
28	RQ_Relationships_mine	Personal account of relationships on Nexus
29	RQ_Relationships_observed	Account of relationships amongst others on Nexus
30	TL_Attributes	Compassion, vulnerability, trust
31	TL_Behaviour_skills	Learning new skills
32	TL_Devt_higher level awareness	World-centric understanding of and connection with reality
33	TL_Devt_spirituality	Metaphysical awakening
34	TL_Increased openess	How do I know this is true?
35	TL_Negotiating new relationships	Negotiating new relationships
36	TL_Ontology_Ways of being	Liberated/confined/ release/healed/forgiving
37	TL_Professional practice	What happens at work?
38	TL_Renegotiating	Renegotiating existing relationships
39	TL_Self_empowerment	Increased sense of empowerment, social accountability and

		responsibility
40	TL_Self_identity	Aspect of identity affected
41	TL_Self_purpose	Finding meaning
42	TL_Self-exam_negative feelings	Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame
43	TL_Self-exam_positive feelings	Self-examination with feelings of release, healing, forgiveness
44	TL_Self-knowledge	Know self more authentically
45	TL_Worldview_more complex worldview	More inclusive meaning structures
46	TL_Worldview_new awareness	Socio-economic-political contradictions
47	TL_Worldview_prior interpretations	Interpret past experiences differently
48	TL_Worldview_set of assumptions	How does the world work?

APPENDIX 5: Nexus documents

Core Nexus readings (NEXUS, 2016)

The following readings form the heart of the Nexus programme. We expect you to read and reflect on all them, to revisit them throughout the programme, and to reference them where relevant in your assignments.

1) Uncommon Sense, Common Nonsense: Why Some Organisations Consistently Outperform Others by Jules Goddard & Tony Eccles. Profile Books, Copyright 2013. (Frist published 2012) Pages 211 – 218.

2) Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together by William Isaacs. Currency, Copyright 1999. Chapter 14: Dialogue and the New Economy. Pages 321 – 335.

3) The Magic of Dialogue by Daniel Yankelovich. Simon & Schuster, Copyright 1999. Chapter 2: What Makes Dialogue Unique? Pages 35 – 46.

4) On Dialogue by David Bohm. Routledge Classics, Copyright 2004. (First published by Routledge 1996) Pages 6 – 24.

5) Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error by Kathryn Schultz. Harper Collins, Copyright 2010. Chapter 8: The Allure of Certainty. Pages 159 – 180.

6) Not Knowing: The Art of Turning Uncertainty into Opportunity by Steven D'Souza and Diana Renner. Chapter 3: Growth of the Unknown. LID Publishing Ltd, Copyright 2014. Pages 80 – 89.

7) The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation and Action by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. Whole Systems Associates. (2003)

8) A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas by Warren Berger. Chapter 4 (partial): Questioning in Business. Bloomsbury, Copyright 2014. Pages 135 – 159.

9) The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on What Matters by Peter Block. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Copyright 2012. Pages 27 – 50.

10) Turning to One Another by Margaret J. Wheatley. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Copyright 2002. Page 145.

The Assessment System

There is an assessment system that forms part of the Nexus programme. This system has been designed to support your learning.

1. Presence

The first component of the assessment process is presence. In order for you to receive your Nexus certificate, you must attend at least 80% of the scheduled programme events. You will need to listen, observe, ask and discuss. To truly benefit from this programme you will need to take responsibility for your own learning. In turn, your active participation will contribute to the learning of other participants.

2. Assignments

The second component of the assessment process is the successful completion of the five assignments outlined below. The first two assignments are designed to deepen your learning by giving you an opportunity to apply, and to reflect on, the practice of dialogue. The third assignment gives you the freedom to identify an issue that is of particular interest or value to you on the course and to explore it in more detail. The final two assignments are reflective in nature, asking you to consolidate and synthesise your key 'take-aways' from the course. Please see the descriptions that follow for details regarding submission dates, format and the specific requirements of each assignment.

Please note that the Aspire system does not accept late assignments!

Assignments and group project

Assignment 1:
Engaging in Dialogue Across Difference

Format:

1. 3-4 page written assignment. Word File (Do not submit PDF files) Please use 11 point font and 1.15 line spacing. Do not create a cover page.

Description: You have been introduced to four key practices of dialogue: listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing. In this assignment, we would like you to put those practices to use to consciously building a relationship with someone in your organisation or community who you perceive to be different from you in some important way.

Once you have identified a person, you will need to explain the purpose of your assignment (to practice dialogue and explore how it is different from other types of engagements) and invite them to participate with you. That will involve spending a **minimum** of four hours – ***in four separate, 1-hour sessions*** – engaging in dialogue with you.

Please remember that while the practices of dialogue are powerful tools to deepen our communication with others, on their own they do not transform a conversation into a dialogue. A dialogue is a formal process where everyone involved understands at least the basics of dialogue and willingly agrees to participate. You will, therefore, not only need to explain your assignment to your partner and gain their agreement before you start, but in your first session, you will need to introduce your partner to the basic practices of dialogue and work together to apply them going forward. This means that you will **both** strive to:

- Practice active listening. Cultivate an inner silence that allows you to listen without resistance from your own thoughts and feelings;
- Practice respecting. Look for what is highest and best in the other person. Discover what they have to teach you.
- Practice suspending. Challenge yourself to suspend your own sense of 'rightness'. Emphasise questions rather than answers. Allow each other to expand your understanding of the 'big picture'.
- Practice voicing. Find the courage to speak from your heart at a time and in way that takes the dialogue to a new or deeper place.

Please note that this is a dialogue and not an interview process. There should be an equal exchange between you, not a one-way extraction of information.

At the end of this process, write a 3-4 page essay reflecting on this journey of relationship-building through dialogue.

Please note that in the written assignment, we are interested in what you learned about 1) dialogue (and your ability to put the theory into practice) and 2) yourself. We do not require a detailed account of the *content* of your dialogue. The content is only relevant where it helps you to illustrate your learning.

It may help you to consider the following questions, but please don't feel limited by them:

- Who was the person you chose and how did you see your differences at the start of this process?

- How did this understanding shift, if it did, over the course of getting to know the person better? What role do you think that dialogue played in that shift, if any?
- Do you feel these practices helped you to be more authentic in your engagement with this person? Why or why not?
- In what ways are the practices of dialogue different from your normal patterns of communication and what use do you think they may have in your life outside of this assignment?
- What did you learn about dialogue and about yourself during the course of this activity? (i.e. What came easily to you in this process? What challenged you and why? What surprised you?)
- How will you use the lessons you have learned in this assignment to deepen the practice of dialogue in your Working Group?
- What impact did this experience have on you and what will that change in your life going forward?

Please provide specific examples from your dialogue to illustrate your learning and make reference the core readings where relevant.

Assignment 2:
Dialogue in the Workplace

Format:

1. 3-4 page written assignment. Word File (Do not submit PDF files) Please use 11 point font and 1.15 line spacing. Do not create a cover page.

Description: For this assignment, we would like you to reflect on the four key practices of dialogue - listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing – and to identify the one that is the biggest challenge for you. Please consider this question carefully. You may want to ask some of the people close to you which of these practices they think you struggle with the most.

Once you have identified a practice, your assignment is to bring this practice actively into your work environment for at least three weeks. Practice it consciously in your interactions with others and keep a journal of what happens.

At the end of this process, write a 3-4-page essay reflecting on your efforts to cultivate this practice in the workplace. You must provide **at least seven specific examples / experiences** describing your attempts to bring this practice into your work life and the results of your efforts. Once again, we are primarily interested in what you learned about 1) this specific practice of dialogue and 2) about yourself during this process.

In writing up your experience, it may help you to consider the following questions, but please don't be limited by them:

- What practice did you identify as being the most challenging for you and why? Can you identify experiences in your life that have contributed to this practice being difficult for you? What would need to change for you – beliefs, assumptions, values, attitudes, etc. – to become more adept at this practice?
- How did you go about bringing this practice into your work life? What did you do differently? (Give at least seven specific examples.)

- What happened? (What was the most challenging aspect of this process? What surprised you?)
- What was the impact or outcome of your efforts? What did you learn from that? What new questions do you have?
- What insights did you gain and how will you apply them to your life going forward?

Please reference the core readings where relevant.

Assignment 3 (Part 1):
Deepening Your Learning

Part One: Proposal

Format:

1. Written assignment. Word File (Do not submit PDF files) Please use 11 point font and 1.15 line spacing. Do not create a cover page.

Description: The purpose of this assignment as a whole is for you to design and complete an activity that you believe will deepen your learning on this programme in a meaningful way.

To do this, you will need to reflect on the questions you have, the resistance that you are feeling, the interest that has been sparked to date or the fears that have emerged. Based on these reflections, you will submit a proposal for an activity that will assist you to explore this question, resistance, interest, fear, etc. We will meet with you individual to discuss, and to finalise, these proposals with you.

Once your proposal has been accepted, you will have a month to implement the idea and submit reflections outlining what you have learned.

It is important that you choose an activity that has meaning to you. (A good test of this is whether it excites and / or scares you.) Below are several suggestions to spark your thinking, but please do not be limited by them. Remember, there are no constraints on what you do as long as it relates to the Nexus programme and will serve your learning in some important way.

Some ideas:

- Design a process to engage with a burning question that you are holding. Think about what you need to do, or who you need to talk to, to make progress towards deepening your understanding or resolving your conflict or confusion.
- Explore a complex issue that you think is important in South Africa - and which you have feel passionately about - using the practices and principals of dialogue to do so. The issue can be social, political, economic, religious – whatever you choose. Seek out and engage with a diversity of perspectives and views.
- Think about how you can best apply your learning from Nexus in your workplace and develop a plan to do so.
- Design and facilitate a Learning Journey for people in your workplace to explore the value of experiential learning in your organisation. Think about what you want to achieve, what experience would help you to achieve it, who would need to attend – and then make it happen.
- Host a series of dialogues in your workplace or community to learn more about how to convene and facilitate a dialogue and the impact it can have.

- Design and implement a learning journey for yourself to walk into and explore a fear or belief that you believe is holding you back in some way.

Once you have your idea, write it up in a proposal which included the following:

- A description of what you propose to do,
- A motivation for how that activity or process will deepen your learning on the Nexus programme;
- A statement describing how the activity or process will stretch or challenge you; and
- A description of what you will submit to document both the experience and your learning. This should include a list of the questions you expect to respond to in your reflections.

Assignment 3 (Part 2):
Deepening Your Learning

Part Two: Reflections

Format:

1. 3-4 page written assignment. Word File (Do not submit PDF files) Please use 11 point font and 1.15 line spacing. Do not create a cover page.

Description: Please write 3-4 pages of reflections outlining what you learned from the activity you chose to do.

Please note that both the form of these reflections and the specific questions you expect to respond to will be outlined in your proposal and will be different for each person.

Assignment 4:
Community Learning Project
Taking the Trouble to See Each Other

"The first act of love is to see this person or this object, this reality as it truly is. And this involves the enormous discipline of dropping your desires, your prejudices, your memories, your projections, your selective way of looking ...a discipline so great that most people would rather plunge headlong into good actions and service than submit to the burning fire of this asceticism. When you set out to serve someone whom you have not taken the trouble to see, are you meeting that person's need or your own?
~ Anthony de Mello

Format:

1) 15- 20 minute Group Presentation (*the exact timing will depend on the number of groups*)

- **AND**
  A 1-2 page written reflection from each group member. (See details below.) This should be a Word File. Please use 11 point font and 1.15 line spacing.

Description: During our Retreat, groups will form around areas of interest and / or passion. Each group will plan and implement a 'Community Learning Project' which will take place sometime before October The objective of the Community Learning Project is for each group to implement a one-day project with a community of your choice in which you undertake to

truly ‘see’ one another.

What does this mean? It means that the main aim of your engagement with the community is to learn who each other are; to learn with, and from, each other. You may decide to do this in the context of a shared activity – an event, a joint act of service, a dialogue – but the intention should be shared learning, rather than charity. To do with rather than to do for. The intention should be to fully operationalize the practice of respect by actively seeking what others have to teach you, and by opening yourself to sharing your story as well.

If this seems confusing, please don’t worry. The planning session during the Retreat will support you to understand the parameters of the assignment, to form groups around common interest and passions and to plan your day.

Each group will present their Community Learning Project. You may make use of any media: powerpoint, video, drama, visual aids, music, handouts etc. Whatever you do, please be creative. Think about what makes a presentation interesting. Speak from the heart.

In your presentation, you should address the following questions:

- What is your understanding of **shared learning** and how did you privilege it in your engagement?
- What did you learn? (Especially with regards to what it means to do with, as opposed to for, others and what it takes to move beyond your assumptions and truly ‘see’ other people)
- Based on this experience, what are your thoughts on how we as South Africans can come to see one another more fully? (As equal partners in effecting positive change?)

You are welcome to invite family, friends or colleagues outside of Nexus to the Community Learning Project presentations. This is an opportunity for people who have heard you talk about the programme to see it in action. We will let you know closer to the time how many guests you can each invite.

In addition to the presentation, each individual will submit a 1-2 page document reflecting on your core learnings about yourself, shared-learning, action and change. Please note that you do not have to describe the project in detail in this document. We are interested here in your individual lessons from the experience. The key questions you should reflect on are:

- How did you apply what you have learned in Nexus in your Community Learning Project? (i.e. What was different in the way you approached this activity than it might have been before this programme?)
- What was your most valuable learning from this project?
- What else have you learned of value? About yourself? About service? About shared learning? About taking action? About effecting change? Or…?
- Based on this experience, what new insights do you have about the boundaries you have erected (or that you don’t challenge) in your own life? Where are they? Where do they come from? In what ways do they serve you and in what ways don’t they serve you? What might be the benefits of crossing some of those boundaries? What can you do differently to make this happen more often?
- Based on this experience, what are your thoughts on how we as South Africans can come to see one another more fully? (As equal partners in effecting positive change?)

Assignment 5:
Pecha Kucha

Format: 7 slides or objects (see description below) plus an electronic version of your presentation with a written description / motivation for each object or image.

Description: In our final session each person will present a *Pecha Kucha Presentation* reflecting on your personal journey on Nexus.

Pecha Kucha requirements: Create 7 slides that hold some meaning for you in terms of your personal growth on Nexus. No writing is allowed on your slides. The images or objects may not be related to each other. You will have **30 seconds maximum per image/object** to explain the meaning of each slide.

Programme Objectives (NEXUS, 2016)

"People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never 'arrive'. Sometimes, language, such as the term 'personal mastery' creates a misleading sense of definiteness, of black and white. But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas.
And they are deeply self-confident.
Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see the 'journey is the reward'.
~ Peter Senge

Our Objectives for the Programme

Through experiential learning, reflection and dialogue, the Nexus programme will support you to:

1. Have conversations with others in ways that deepen understanding, generate new insights and open possibility;
2. Develop and deepen societal and contextual intelligence and personal wisdom; and
3. Nurture a greater sense of agency to effect positive change in your personal and organisational life and in the life of the country as a whole.

If you participate fully in the programme, by the end of the year you will:

1. Develop greater self-awareness, be more willing to challenge your own assumptions and more open to the discomfort – and the gift - of 'not-knowing';
2. See more potential in others and actively seek out divergent and diverse perspectives;
3. Think more critically about the issues affecting South Africa and the opportunities to leverage positive change; and
4. Believe more strongly in your own ability to be an agent to effect that change.

APPENDIX 6: Similarity report – digital receipt

turnitin

Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author:	Viv Spooner
Assignment title:	Test your research content
Submission title:	Vivienne Spooner final thesis
File name:	20181129_Viv_Spooner_Final_vers..
File size:	2.33M
Page count:	326
Word count:	127,917
Character count:	678,825
Submission date:	29-Nov-2018 02:54PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	1047065737

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Exploring nonformal adult learning in a business school leadership programme: A case study of the Nexus programme

by

Vivienne Susan Spooner

A dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg

Supervisor: Professor Vaughn John

2018

Originality report – similarity index

Vivienne Spooner final thesis

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6%	6%	2%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

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